LIVE *WITHOUT* STRESS

How to Enjoy the Journey

DR. MARVIN MARSHALL

author of

Discipline Without Stress &

Parenting Without Stress

LIVE *WITHOUT* STRESS

Also by Marvin Marshall

Discipline without Stress® Punishments or Rewards: How Teachers and Parents Promote Responsibility & Learning

Parenting without Stress®: How to Raise Responsible Kids While Keeping a Life of Your Own

101 Tips from Parenting Without Stress

Tips for Promoting Responsibility

Fostering Social Responsibility

Encouraging Responsible Student Behavior

Children of the Rainbow School

School Announcements:
One Question a Day to Promote Responsibility

180 School Announcements:
One Question a Day to Promote Responsibility

Teachers Matter: 17 Articles to Promote Learning

Praise for Live Without Stress

"Stress can be a killer. It can kill the joy of life. It can kill a career. Experts tell us that it can literally kill you. In '*Live Without Stress: How to Enjoy the Journey,'* Dr. Marvin Marshall gives us some practical, real-world ideas on how to manage stress and live a much healthier life.

"I particularly liked the way he addressed the importance of a positive attitude, nutrition, the right amount of sleep and more. After making the case for reducing and managing stress in a healthy, positive way, he gives a lot of great ideas that you can implement immediately.

"The ideas presented are backed up with good authorities and research. Marshall offers steps to take that are based on sound, reasonable approaches that can work for you in your daily life.

"If you've been meaning to reduce your stress—and thereby enhance your health—this is a wonderful book that you will not only enjoy, but also be thankful that you read it. I'm thankful that I read this and can apply its recommendations. You will be glad you read this book."

Terry Brock
Technology Expert and Author of *Klout Matters*

"Live Without Stress is counter-intuitive in that Marvin Marshall teaches that stress really comes from actions and thoughts. What one believes, assumes or expects impacts tremendously how effectively we behave in the situation. One of my favorite chapters was 'Competition and Collaboration' because of the explanation of the benefits and drawbacks of each approach. You will enjoy the examples and stories of success, which make this book quite enjoyable"

Bob Hoglund
Co-author of *The School for Quality Learning* (implementing ideas of William Glasser and W. Edwards Deming)

"Stress is necessary in life, but if managed poorly stress makes life miserable. Dr. Marvin Marshall shows you how to reduce the negative impact of stress in your life and career."

Jim Cathcart
Author of *The Self-Motivation Handbook, The Acorn Principle, and Relationship Selling*

"Marshall's advice on living without stress is relevant and actionable for anyone. He doesn't mince words or soft peddle easy 1-2-3 ideas that never work in the long run. I highly recommend this book!"

Eric Chester
Author of *Reviving Work Ethic, On Fire at Work,* and *Employing Generation Why?*

"If you need both instruction and inspiration about how to decrease the stress and increase the joy of life, you will definitely like this book."

Mark Sanborn
Author of *The Fred Factor* and *Insights on Business and Life*

"To reduce stress, it's essential to study the assumptions you make, how your thoughts affect your emotions, and how you are motivated. This book is a fascinating look at the brain-body stress connection and how to live a stress-free life."

Randy Gage
Author of *Risky Is the New Safe* and *Mad Genius*

"If you're stressed out, raise your hand. If your hand just went up, even though you're standing in a bookstore or reading this on your computer, then this book is for you! *Live Without Stress* by Dr. Marvin Marshall addresses so many places where we find stress in our lives—and gives practical, yet brilliant approaches to dealing with it."

David Glickman
Keynote Laughter Crafter

"I have read a lot of books and articles on stress and usually come away from them thinking, 'Yep, I've got it!' Dr. Marvin Marshall's wonderful book is so powerful because it offers practical strategies for combating stress and...more importantly...for using self-empowerment to create positive outcomes. Buy several copies and share this wise message with your friends and family."

Lou Heckler
Speaker Hall of Fame Helping Organizations and Individuals Achieve Higher Productivity

"Marvin Marshall's book about living without stress will give you an interesting perspective on how to reduce your stress in all aspects of your life. It's an easy-to-read, well-balanced, and witty book that I would recommend to anyone feeling overwhelmed."

Laura Stack
Author of *Doing the Right Things Right* and Self-Development Programs

"Dr. Marshall has created a readable, thought provoking book full of great analogies and stories that make his ideas and insights on 'Live Without Stress' actionable. The Key Points at the end of each chapter solidify the ideas and keep awareness high so we can easily implement his suggestions."

Elizabeth Jeffries
Author of *The Heart of Leadership: How to Inspire, Encourage and Motivate People to Follow You*

"Dr. Marshall addresses the most important element of a stress-free life—taking responsibility for how you approach life. This starts with your attitude and thinking, as he aptly points out. If you find yourself having more stress than you'd like, then read this book immediately!"

Rebecca Morgan
Author of *Calming Upset Customers*

"This newest book by Dr. Marshall is a must read. It will help you reduce stress in your life. I recommend it highly to all who have some or a lot of stress in their life and business."

George Hedley
Author of *Get Your Business to Work*

"Marvin Marshall has done it again! He's written another compelling, yet highly practical book on controlling stress in our lives. '*Live Without Stress: How to Enjoy the Journey'* has so much to offer. For example, Marshall's stress reducing concept on how assumptions can significantly impact our stress level is particularly eye opening. In addition, he provides wonderful insights about how our thinking has a direct impact on our feelings and our health. If you are seeking a more joy-filled and stress-free life, absolutely add this valuable resource to your library!"

Dick Bruso
Founder of *Heard Above The Noise* and Branding Expert

"Again Marv has conveyed what can be a complex topic with ease, grace and practicality. His knowledge, ideas and experience make for a great read for all that wish to live without stress."

Karen Boyes
Editor, *Spectrum Education* and *Habits of the Mind*

"In this timely and important work, Dr. Marvin Marshall takes his readers on a journey filled with great and usable content. This book displays an uncanny way of taking well-researched theory and showing his readers incredibly practical applications. The stories and key points simply add more credence to his premise of an enjoyable journey and discarding the stress along the way."

Edward E. Scannell
Co-Author of *Games Trainers Play* and international expert on Human Resource Management

"To Live Without Stress is my goal. Dr. Marshall's new book now brings that goal closer to reality for me—and for you! 'Live Without Stress' is practical, applicable and easy to implement. I'm already utilizing the stress relieving, "5-Minute Procedure" (Chapter 7, Procedures). And it works! This book is destined to help many others as well."

Phillip Van Hooser
Author of *Leaders Ought To Know*

More Praise—A Few More

"Dr. Marshall's new book, *Live Without Stress*, is a refreshing voice of reason and a beacon of research for the stressful stormy seas of life. His practical tips, based on science and real life examples, offer suggestions to let you know that you are the captain of your ship."

Stephen Sroka
Adjunct Assistant Professor, School of Medicine
Case Western Reserve University

"A great read from beginning to end, Dr. Marshall teaches how to reduce stress using research-based techniques to be emotionally, mentally, and physically healthier. What a wonderful resource! I know I will refer to it over and over again!"

Janet Gibney
Bridgewater, New Jersey

"Marvin Marshall's books have revolutionized teaching and parenting. This one will do it for YOUR LIFE."

Neil Rothman
Palm Beach, Florida

"The information in this book is practical, effective, and positive. Being positive is essential in growing responsible, successful, caring children into adults. I use Dr. Marshall's material in my work with families of young children, and his presentation of key points in supporting children and managing the stress of parenting makes the principles possible to implement simply and consistently."

Cherie Fila
Kingsford, Michigan

"Dr. Marshall's books have been life changing for me as a teacher, wife, and mom. In this book, he gives practical ways to reduce stress in all areas of your life. From your personal life to your professional life, you will benefit from this book. A must-read for all!"

Bradi Holder
Brigham City, Utah

"Dr. Marshall has done it again with this uplifting book that provides practical, proven strategies to reduce stress. Like his other two books, I refer to his recommendations often. He has included examples to assist with the reader's understanding. I recommend this book for every adult."

Irene Thomas
Riverton, Utah

"Marvin Marshall is like a fine wine; he keeps getting better with age. His newest book, *Live Without Stress*, has helped me transition into retirement. It is a must read for people of all ages, full of practical examples and useful tips to get the most out of life. This is a book you will want to keep on your shelf to read and reread through every stage of your life."

Claudia Heinrich
Farmington Hills, Michigan

"In contrast to the multitude of mixed messages in today's world, *Live Without Stress* stands out as precise, unerring, and sure. It is a relief to read a book this direct and practical."

Karen Gmur
Los Angeles, California

"If you want to improve your relationships at home, at work, or with friends, read Dr. Marshall's newest book to gain skills that empower and enrich your ability to reduce your stress. I have implemented changes in our programs to utilize Dr. Marshall's wisdom and have seen immediate positive results."

Liz Witehira
Hamilton, New Zealand

"Dr. Marshall's newest book, *Live Without Stress*, is a no-nonsense, easy-to-read book aimed at the lay person for what is often a difficult subject; however, more advanced readers would also find the book useful. Its real life explanations and examples have a strong link to emotional intelligence."

Alan Cooper, Consultant
New Zealand

LIVE *WITHOUT* STRESS

How to Enjoy the Journey

Dr. Marvin Marshall

Piper Press • Los Alamitos, California

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Piper Press
P.O. Box 2227
Los Alamitos, California 90720
USA

1.714.220.1882

Book Designer: Dawn Josephson
Cover Designer: Brian Vermeire

Library of Congress Control Number: 2016961855

ISBN: 978-0-9890634-5-6

To Evelyn, my wife and love for six decades.

"If you ask what is the single most important key to longevity, I would have to say it is avoiding worry, tension, and stress. And if you didn't ask me, I'd still have to say it."

—George Burns, American entertainer, 1896-1996

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PREFACE

Imagine for a moment that you open a door into a new room. When you enter, you discover that you like this room far better than the one you previously inhabited.

This book will be like entering a new room that brings fresh insights into *how to live without stress*.

INTRODUCTION

Perhaps the most famous statement in the history of philosophy and medicine is Rene Descartes' famous phrase, *"I think; therefore, I am."* This perception still has influence today; it is the foundation of the belief that the brain does not affect the body. We now have convincing evidence that thinking (cognition) significantly affects feelings (emotions), which in turn affects our body's stress.

Circumstances present problems or challenges—depending on our perspective. Up close, the earth looks flat; from outer space, it's round. The difference is in the perspective. Similarly, without our being mindful of what is happening, we create our own perception that often leads to stress.

The effects of stress on the body can be the cause of headaches, weight gain, insomnia, asthma, heart disease, ulcers, depression, migraine headaches, irritable bowel syndrome, and many others harmful effects on the immune system, digestive system, and central nervous system. In addition, a growing body of evidence points to stress as a contributing factor as to whether these develop in the first place because stress damages neurons in the brain.

Anticipation or anxiety can lead to stress. The human mind is so powerful, the connection between perception and physiological response so strong, that the brain can send off the flight, fight, or freeze response by merely imagining a threatening situation. This ability of the brain can be either a source of positive empowerment or it can be an invitation to illness.

Using the mind properly can be a significant source to healing; however, healing of the body can be frustrated by habitually returning to ineffective ways of using the mind. Ailments we typically think of as bodily can be improved by thoughts alone. This mental realm is often the locus or cause of many illnesses. *A quick proof of this is the disappearance of headaches when on vacation.*

Stress makes us feel bad all over. It increases irritability, and everyday activities become chores. We begin avoiding our usual activities—even things we enjoy. Stress also prompts us to make unsound, unwise decisions, including those that directly affect our finances and our jobs. It impinges on

our appetites, having us feel like either eating too much or not enough. Sometimes we even begin to neglect our physical appearance.

Stress can be linked to many activities of which we are not even aware. When we start to use a device or engage in an activity, we forget that it is a tool for us to use—rather than something to control us. For example, numerous studies have linked smart phone dependence to anxiety, stress, and poor cognitive performance.

This book will show how to use some simple strategies to significantly reduce your stress, promote responsibility, increase your effectiveness, improve your relationships, and truly enjoy life's experiences. There *is* one condition, however. You need to *practice* what the book shares.

Finally, an understanding of terms is necessary for clarification. The term "stress" has many definitions including an abbreviation of the word *distress,* as in physical pain, mental suffering, or a traumatic experience. Examples include displacement caused from a hurricane or some external and temporary physical state. Even in these circumstances, however, this book will assist in controlling and handling stress that interferes with enjoyment of your life and others with whom you come in contact.

Part I

INSIGHTS THAT REDUCE STRESS

Assumptions

Brain-Body Connection

External vs. Internal Motivation

Part I
Introduction

INSIGHTS THAT REDUCE STRESS

We make our habits and then our habits make us.
–John Dryden

We begin by learning about *assumptions*. Assumptions direct our behaviors. They can reduce or increase stress and make life's journey less or more enjoyable. If we are walking across the street, we assume that a car will not hit us. If we go to see a motion picture, we assume that we will enjoy ourselves. If we assume that we are unable to do something, chances are that we will not even try. What we assume can have a negative or positive influence on our lives. *The critical point is to become aware of our assumptions because we cannot change things until we first recognize or acknowledge them.* Chapter 1, *Assumptions,* is about understanding our assumptions and how they influence stress levels.

Understanding the *brain-body connection* assists in reducing stress. As the sage said, "Our body is where we are; our mind is where we put it." How we think directly influences our feelings. Chapter 2, *The Brain and Body Connection*, explains how the brain influences the body, how the body influences the mind, the connection between the two, and their relationship to stress.

Motivation, as discussed in this book, can be either external or internal. We sometimes do things because we want to feel comfortable with others and, therefore, act as others do. However, we sometimes do things that may conflict with what others want us to do. Our motivations differ, and understanding the reason behind our actions gives us more control and empowers us. How motivation relates to stress is the topic of Chapter 3, *External vs. Internal Motivation.*

In order to reduce stress, it is essential to gain insight into the assumptions we make, how our thoughts affect our emotions, and how we are motivated.

1
Assumptions

Although assumptions are necessary, they often are the cause of needless stress.
—Marvin Marshall

On a Saturday morning, my wife drove to a medical laboratory. The medical booklet indicated that the laboratory would be open. Upon arrival, she discovered that it was closed; there had been a misprint in the medical directory. If she had been aware of her assumption, she would have made a phone call and saved herself time and energy.

Assumptions are beliefs taken for granted. They are so natural and involuntary that they usually do not enter our consciousness. We assume that when we get out of bed, the floor will be beneath us and that when we mail a letter the intended recipient will receive it. However, there are also assumptions we make that may not be natural or valid. For example, we may assume that someone is angry with us by the manner in which the person speaks to us. Yet it could be that the person is feeling frustrated by an event entirely unconnected to us and is simply "taking it out" on the first person encountered—in this case, you. You have your yearly routine health exam with the assumption that all tests ordered are routine and the results will be favorable, or you can assume that, since the doctor is ordering tests, there will be something wrong.

The significant point to remember is that once we understand that we are making an assumption, we can consciously decide if it serves us well. This understanding gives us more control over our lives and, therefore, can reduce our stress.

ASSUMPTIONS DIRECT OUR BEHAVIOR

Douglas McGregor, a renowned behavioral expert, showed that there are two types of assumptions, which he referred to as Theory X and Theory Y. (In real life situations, however, there are middle grounds between these

polarized positions. Experience, gender, age, and status are some of the many factors that influence our assumptions.)

McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y can be discerned in behaviors between a supervisor and the supervised, a parent and child, a teacher and student, between spouses, and in any relationship.

Theory X

McGregor identified the following assumptions of those who exhibit an authoritarian style in their dealings with others:

1. The average person has an inherent dislike for effort and work.
2. Most people need to be coerced, controlled, or even threatened to get them to put forth adequate effort.
3. The average person prefers to be directed, avoids responsibility, and wants security above all.

Rewards are contingent upon conforming, and punishments are the consequence of deviation from the expected. The Theory X style varies from "hard" to "soft." A drill instructor uses a "hard" approach. A "soft" approach is used in less coercive strategies, such as rewarding or bribing to control.

The coercion and manipulation of Theory X often creates stress, resistance, and poor relationships.

Theory Y

Theory Y assumptions are more consistent with current research and lead to greater success. This approach *creates conditions where people are self-directed* and lead to *collaboration rather than on coercion.*

Theory Y assumptions:

1. Both physical and mental efforts are as natural in work as in play. Fulfilling responsibilities are sources of satisfaction.
2. People exercise self-direction and self-control in activities to which they are committed.
3. Commitment depends on the rewards associated with achievement. *The most significant of rewards is the reward of self-satisfaction.*

Most people tend toward using Theory X. Without even realizing it, people attempt to *control—the basis of Theory X.* In contrast, *Theory Y* relies on *influence.* People feel liberated when they finally let go of the coercion and manipulation of Theory X with its stress, resistance, and poor

relationships. The use of collaboration and empowerment, hallmarks of Theory Y, reduce stress, improves relationships, and is simply much more effective.

The following examples will help you to identify if your usual style is more indicative of Theory X or Theory Y.

- As a supervisor, you tell your subordinates that the new project must be finished by a certain deadline (Theory X) vs. *You explain the reason that the project has a deadline (Theory Y).*

- As a parent, you tell your child that if he/she does not do what is expected, the child will be punished (Theory X) vs. *if the child does not do what is expected, you elicit a consequence or a procedure to help the child help her/himself (Theory Y).*

- You engage in an argument with your spouse and insist you are right (Theory X) vs. *redirecting the argument so that each person can clarify his/her own position (Theory Y).*

CHECKING ASSUMPTIONS

Let's say that you are told in the morning that you will have a meeting with your supervisor in the afternoon. You can assume the meeting will be discouraging or encouraging. If you assume you will be discouraged after the meeting, and you are not, you will have fretted for nothing. In the opposite scenario, if you believe the meeting will bring you good news and it does not, you will be disappointed. Anxiety and other stress-inducing emotions can be avoided if you do not assume what the meeting will be about. *But how do you not think of the forthcoming meeting?*

The quickest way is to redirect your thoughts. As we will discuss in depth in the next chapter, emotions follow cognition. In simple terms, redirect your thinking and the emotion follows. For example, picture yourself walking out of the room after the meeting wearing a big smile. Your stress or anxiety will immediately dissipate.

Assumptions are the mother of so many screw-ups because they are often based on false beliefs. These can lead to botched situations, missed opportunities, and troubled relationships. We may know exactly what we are

thinking and what we mean, but the other person may have a completely different perspective. In an old Calvin and Hobbs comic strip, Calvin says to his mom, "I'm hungry. Can I have a snack?" His mom says, "Sure. Help yourself." In the next scene, Calvin is walking through the living room with one cookie in his hand and another one in his mouth. From the next room, he hears his mom say, "You can have an apple or an orange from the fridge." Calvin stands there and thinks, "Even though we are both speaking English, we are not speaking the same language." Calvin's definition of a snack is a cookie. His mother's definition is an apple or an orange.

Here is another example. A father is walking through the forest with his three-year-old daughter. As they are walking, he repeatedly tells her to stay on the path. The little girl is walking all around. She looks at a green fern, a red bush, and meanders here and there. The father repeatedly says, "Stay on the path. I told you to stay on the path." Eventually, he gets so angry with her that he pulls her over, shakes her a bit, and shouts, "I told you to stay on the path!" The little girl looks up at him with tears in her eyes and says, "Daddy, what's a path?"

> NOTE: The term "expectation" can sometimes be interchanged with the term "assumption." However, to make the difference clear, "expectation" connotes looking forward to or anticipating something, whereas "assumption" indicates something taken for granted. The prime point to understand is that articulating someone else's motivation is both an assumption and guesswork. No one can know for certain the motivation of other people—and in many cases people won't or are unable to articulate their own motivation.

False assumptions are prevalent in thousands of classrooms in schools of all grade levels. (I can attest to this having served as an elementary, middle, and high school principal.) Specifically, teachers *teach* a lesson and *assume* students have *learned* what was taught—*without checking to see that ALL students know how to implement the lesson.*

My wife's thinking is rather circular; mine is linear. In order for me to truly understand my wife's communications to me, I do not assume I know what she wants. I continually check to be sure I understand that what I hear is what she meant. Perhaps, the point can be "humorized": "*I know you*

believe you understood what you think I said, but I am not sure you realize that what you heard is not what I meant."

Learning to check your assumptions is something you can do if you focus on it. Assuming we know a person's motivation is common and even necessary in certain situations. For example, my wife writes novels, and explaining motivation is often critical for character development. In real life, however, assuming another person's motivation is guesswork.

I no longer waste time and energy trying to identify the motivations of other people. Instead I have learned to focus solely on behavior. I find that this approach allows me to make better decisions, have better relations, and have more control in a conversation.

A discussion about assumptions perhaps is best illustrated with the famous poem that makes the point: Assumptions may be false.

It was six men of Indostan
To learning much inclined,
Who went to see the elephant,
(Though all of them were blind),
That each by observation
Might satisfy his mind.

The *First* approached the elephant,
And happening to fall
Against his broad and sturdy side,
At once began to bawl:
"God bless me, but the Elephant
Is very like a wall!"

The *Second*, feeling of the tusk,
Cried, "Ho! What have we here?
So very round and smooth and sharp
To me 'tis mighty clear,
This wonder of an elephant is very like a spear!"

The *Third* approached the animal,
And happening to take
The squirming trunk within his hands,
Thus boldly up and spake:

"I see," quoth he, "the elephant
Is very like a snake!"

The *Fourth* reached out an eager hand,
And felt about the knee:
"What most this wondrous beast is like
Is mighty plain," quoth he,
"'Tis clear enough the elephant
Is very like a tree!"

The *Fifth*, who chanced to touch the ear
Said, "Even the blindest man
Can tell what this resembles most:
Deny the fact who can,
This marvel of an elephant is very like a fan!"

The *Sixth* no sooner had begun
About the beast to grope,
Then, seizing on the swinging tail
That fell within his scope,
"I see," quoth he, "the elephant
Is very like a rope!"

And so these men of Indostan
Disputed loud and long,
Each in his own opinion
Exceeding stiff and strong,
Though each was partly in the right,
And all were in the wrong!

Blind Men and the Elephant
—by John Godfrey Saxe

KEY POINTS

- Be mindful of your approach when working with others. Theory X assumptions prompt coercion. Theory Y assumptions prompt influence and collaboration.

- Assumptions are beliefs taken for granted.
- Wrong assumptions can lead to regret.
- Assuming another person's motivation is guesswork. Instead, focus on the person's behavior.

2
The Brain-Body Connection

The function of the body is to carry the brain around.
—Thomas Alva Edison

We return to Rene Descartes' phrase, *"I think; therefore, I am."* This incorrect perception still has a significant influence on our thinking today because it rejects the fact that the brain and the body are so inextricably interwoven that they cannot be separated.

We now have incontrovertible evidence proving that *thinking* affects the body—that the brain is so interwoven by collections of systems that body and brain cannot be separated. Convincing confirmation has proven that feelings (emotions) cannot be separated from cognition (thinking). In short, our thinking significantly affects our emotions, which in turn affects our body's stress level. Our understanding of this connection is critical to reducing stress—specifically (1) the effect that our thoughts have on our body and (2) the effect that our physical health has on our brain.

SOURCES OF OUR BEHAVIORS

Here are three situations. The *first*: Assume for a moment that you are looking forward to watching a special program on television. You have had your dinner, are comfortably reclining, and engrossed in the program. The telephone rings. You can respond by answering the phone call, or letting it ring, or having the telephone-answering device respond to it. Here is a *second* situation: You are in your residence and hear the doorbell ring. Your natural response is to see who is at the door. In the *third* situation, you are driving and approaching a red light; your natural response is to stop. Your initial responses to (1) answer a ringing phone, (2) see who is at the door, or (3) stop at a red light are all actually responses to stimuli. They are external sources that prompt—*but do not cause*—your response. The critical understanding is to be aware that stimuli do not *make* you respond.

I used to travel to New York City each month for three years to work with a client. While there, I would visit my cousin, a senior editor for a major worldwide business magazine. Obviously, my cousin was a sharp guy. Even so, I was not successful in convincing him that the ringing of the phone, the ringing of a doorbell, or seeing a red light were simply *information*—that they were *not* automatically *controlling* his behavior.

Compare this with the man who was a houseguest at his friend's home, many years ago before telephone-answering devices were around. As the two friends talked, the phone began ringing. The host ignored it and kept on talking. The guest, desiring to have the phone answered, became progressively anxious as the phone continued to ring. Finally, he blurted out, "Aren't you going to answer the phone?" "No," his host replied. "I installed the phone for my convenience, and it isn't at my convenience to answer it now."

Consciously or nonconsciously[1] we choose our responses to stimuli. In practical application, it doesn't make a particle of difference if these reactions I proposed are conscious or nonconscious. There is a problem, however, when we think our responses are *automatically controlled by external stimuli.* The harm comes when, by inference, we think that the ringing of the phone or doorbell or the red light *causes* our behavior—as if an outside force or person *makes* us act as we do. We will later discuss the choices we have and our responses to them, but at this point it is important to understand that nothing *causes* us to behave. Even though we hear, "There was no choice," the fact remains that choice ends when life ends. We make thousands of choices each day—really every moment. Once we start to become conscious of this fact, we take the second step in understanding stress. The first is simply to become aware of assumptions and the second is to understand that nothing *causes* us to behave. Our actions are based upon our thoughts (internal stimuli) and our responses to external stimuli.

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[1] The common term used in this type of discussion is "unconscious." When I suggested to a few brain research experts that the term "nonconscious" is more accurate, they all quickly agreed.

PHYSIOLOGY

This book is primarily about how to reduce stress. If you are interested in learning about the medical or biological effects of stress on the body, much information is available on the Internet. An excellent source in print is Bruce McEwen's "*The End of Stress As We Know It.*"

To have some understanding of major physiological points about the connection between body and brain, here is a simple explanation of how the body creates stress (something that scientists refer to as "noxious stimuli"). Stress begins deep in the brain, where a structure referred to as the hypothalamus sounds an alert to the adrenal glands located on top of the kidneys. This sends out hormones—the most common of which is adrenaline. There is clear evidence that adrenaline is a stress hormone that prompts fear, panic, or perceived threat.

Another hormone, cortisol, solidifies not only fear but also the place where the emotion first erupted. Cortisol works on the amygdala, which plays a prominent role in forming long-term memories associated with fearful or traumatic events. The amygdala stores the emotional content of memory—chiefly fear. The amygdala is also involved in what we might call anticipatory angst, the fears and anxieties that we harbor regardless of whether there is legitimate reason to worry. So, increased stress hormone levels in the amygdala can make us fret even more, augmenting the stress we are already under.

The pulse begins to race as the adrenaline steps up the heart rate, sending extra blood to the muscles and organs. Oxygen rushes in as the bronchial tubes in the lungs dilate; extra oxygen also reaches the brain. The hair stands on end because adrenaline constricts the blood vessels that supply the skin. The adrenaline also mobilizes the body to release glucose providing a ready source of energy. This process creating stress invariably creates negative emotions.

Frustration, anxiety, depression, hostility, perception of lack of control, and unpredictability are major driving forces for the release of hormones into the bloodstream.

The brain is plastic in the sense that it is malleable, resilient, and responsive. Not only our experiences but also our thoughts develop new connections that rewire the brain. The connections grow new cells throughout our lives—a process referred to as neurogenesis—and is closely linked to learning and memory.

In sum, *stress is learned* and remembered. Our repeated thoughts and actions alter the neural connections and the functioning of our brains.

MIND FITNESS

There is one sure way to improve your mental fitness and reduce stress: *move*! The human body was not developed to be static.

Exercise stimulates the release of growth hormones, which stimulate the production of a protein that targets muscles for growth. This increased production of the protein supports neuron development and helps to sharpen memory and make the brain more efficient.

The consequences of a sedentary life style are well documented and dire. People with low levels of physical activity are at higher risk for many different types of cancer, heart disease, and even Alzheimer's disease. Long before the end of life, inactivity can worsen arthritis symptoms, increase lower back pain, and lead to depression and anxiety. Aerobic exercise in particular has been shown to be one of the most effective approaches to reducing stress—in addition to reducing the risk of vascular dementia.

Since so many of us live a sedentary life style, the following tale is shared in an attempt to prompt us to exercise and move more.

> A farmer's donkey fell into a well. The animal brayed piteously for some time as the farmer tried to figure out what to do. Finally, the farmer decided that since the animal was very old and that the well needed to be covered up anyway, he grabbed a shovel and began to shovel dirt into the well.
>
> The donkey's "eeyoure" continued—then quieted down. A few shovel loads later, the farmer looked into the well and was astonished at what he saw.
>
> With every shovel of dirt that landed on the donkey's back, the animal shook off the dirt and took a step up higher to the farmer. As the farmer continued to shovel dirt, the donkey shook it off and took another step higher. Soon, the donkey stepped up over the edge of the well and trotted off.

Moral of the story: *Life sometimes shovels some dirt on you. The trick is to shake it off and keep moving.*

KEY POINTS

- Thinking (cognition) and feelings (emotions) are inseparable.
- Emotions are a function of the brain's interactions with the rest of the body.
- The brain is malleable, resilient, and responsive, but stress can stifle its growth.
- Stress can be reduced through movement.
- Exercise is essential for a healthy functioning brain.

3
External vs. Internal Motivation

Motivation is the art of getting people to do what YOU want them to do because THEY want to do it.
—Dwight David Eisenhower

We learned in the first chapter that our assumptions sway our thinking. In Chapter Two, we gained an understanding of how our thinking impacts our feelings and our stress levels. We now address the third critical understanding for stress reduction: how we are motivated.

EXPLANATION OF TERMS

The term "motivation" has many definitions. The most commonly used are *external/extrinsic* and *internal/intrinsic*.

In a technical sense, however, all motivation emanates from *within* a person. In practice though people are often influenced or inspired by someone or something outside of themselves. In these cases, people are stimulated. However, we do not usually refer to humans as "stimulators." We refer to people as motivators, as in, "She is a terrific motivational speaker"—rather than, "She is a terrific stimulator, influencer, or inspirer."

External and *extrinsic* refer to motivation that originates from some stimulus *outside* of us. The stimulus persuades, induces, inspires, encourages, cajoles, spurs, triggers, provokes, rewards, or punishes. External motivation includes societal influences for a desire to cooperate and the powerful pressure of peers.

Internal or *intrinsic* motivation applies when people act for some *inner* reason—prompted by interest, curiosity, desire, or by some necessity such as eating and sleeping. This type of motivation is innate; it engages the natural propensity to engage in an activity *not* influenced from anything outside the person.

In this book, the terms *external* motivation and *internal* motivation are used to contrast influences emanating from *outside* vs. *inside* a person. An

awareness of the difference between the two is the first step in understanding and deciding when to accept or act on something external vs. when to resist its influence. Understanding the *source* of motivation empowers us to reduce stress that can impact us in negative ways.

People operate from both external and internal motivation. For example, your mate knows you went to the grocery store. When you return, you *asked* for assistance to take in your purchase and the person helped you. Compare this to where your mate helped take in the groceries *without being asked.* Notice that the *behavior was identical*. In the first example, *external* motivation was used because the motivation came from you, whereas in the latter case, the motivation was *internal* in that there was no outside influence. The critical point to understand is that—although the *actions* were identical in that the groceries were taken in—the *motivations* were different.

EXTERNAL MOTIVATION

There is no discounting the significance that external motivation has on our lives. Humans are social beings and have an inborn desire to be *liked by others* and *fit in with others*. The easiest way to accomplish this is to be like others and do what others do.

It starts at young ages, and here is how it works. A young person likes a group, all of whose members smoke. The person wants to be like the others so the person starts to smoke. *No one from the smoking group prompted or told the person to start smoking*. The person started to smoke because the *unspoken influence from others prompted the person to smoke.*

You notice that a close friend has lost weight and you comment on it. Your friend shares with you his new eating and exercising routine. The next time you look in the mirror you decide to join your friend in his health routine; this external influence prompted you to act.

Recent advances in technology have had a profound influence on society. The violence and lightning-speed actions of many video games, movies, and television programs are undoubtedly aimed at young people. Marketing to youth as a culture of its own is obvious in the entertainment and fashion industries. A look at almost any fashion advertisement attests to the focus on the young. A parent's purchase of the "wrong brand" is ample evidence of the strong desire of youth to "fit in" with what is popular with their peer group. The same holds true for adults, the corollary being "keeping up with the Joneses." We see other examples of external motivation when viewing

television news as crowds act with a "herd mentality" in mob aggression causing personal injury and property destruction.

INTERNAL MOTIVATION

Abraham Maslow, best known for his theory of psychological health, stated the concept of internal motivation clearly: *"Human life will never be understood unless its highest aspirations are taken into account. Self-actualization, the striving toward health, the quest for identity and autonomy, the yearning for excellence, and other ways of phrasing the striving 'upward' must now be accepted beyond question as a widespread and even universal tendency."*

Self-actualization is the highest level of Maslow's well-known *Hierarchy of Needs.* As we live and have experiences, we are able to differentiate between different types of motivation. And as we mature with age and experiences, there tends to be a natural desire to move toward self-actualization, which *can only be achieved through internal motivation.* This kind of motivation makes life more meaningful.

W. Edwards Deming, the man who brought quality to the workplace by collaboration and continual improvement, believed that the internal motivation of desire leading to performance, productivity, and quality work *could not be legislated, manipulated, or mandated.* He taught that all human beings are born with an inner drive to learn, to take pride in their work, to experiment, and to improve. These statements reflect the significant approach of "Theory Y."

Thomas Armstrong, an education expert, has written that even when working with young people labeled with attention deficit disorder (ADD) and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), it may be far better to use behavioral strategies that *internally empower* rather than those that employ external control.

In their explanatory book, "*Why We Do What We Do: Understanding Self-Motivation,"* Edward Deci and Richard Flaste show that internal rather than external motivation is at the heart of creativity, responsibility, healthy behavior, and lasting change. Internal motivation is the key to learning and educational success. The point is illustrated well in the perceptive Calvin and Hobbs cartoon where Calvin says to his teacher*, "You can give me the information, but you can't make me learn."* Calvin is correct; no one can *make* another person learn. However, a young person can certainly be *influenced* to learn. In today's society, the most effective approach for learn-

ing and changing behavior is to *influence without coercion*—in short, using Theory Y, in contrast to Theory X that relies on coercion.

Imagine, for a moment, that you are presented with the questions below. The italicized concept following each question describes some of the principles used in this book, all of which are rooted in *internal motivation.* They also give a preview of other topics to be explored. The exercise is an attempt to prove Aristotle's conclusion that an emotional outcome like happiness is the appropriate end of all behaviors because it is *internally* satisfying. As enjoyable as *external rewards* are when we receive them, very few are as meaningful in contrast to the feeling we receive from our own efforts, the *internal reward of satisfaction.*

- You are given the responsibility of a project. Which would you prefer to hear?
  A. Your team will be assigned.
  B. You can choose your team.
  Choice empowers.

- Which would be most effective for your own improvement?
  A. Your supervisor tells you what you did was wrong.
  B. You realize what you did wrong—without hearing it from someone else.
  Self-evaluation is essential for lasting improvement.

- You throw a wad of paper across the workroom. Your boss sees it leave your hand. Which would be more successful for controlling yourself in the future?
  A. The boss tells you to pick it up.
  B. Your boss doesn't say anything, but you pick it up.
  Self-correction is the most successful approach for changing behavior.

- You notice a wastepaper basket on its side. Which would give you more satisfaction?
  A. Having someone suggest you turn it upright.
  B. Turning it upright without anyone's saying anything.

Acting responsibly is more satisfying through internal rather than external motivation.

- You are a teenager and you want to visit a friend on a school night. Which would you rather hear from your parent?
  A. No, you cannot go until your homework is completed.
  B. Of course you can go, as soon as your work is completed.
  Positivity is more constructive than negativity.

People choose Answer B to the preceding questions because of two dynamic motivators, both of which are internal. The first involves integrity and a sense of *"It's the right thing to do."* The second carries with it a sense of control, which is closely related to choice. Deprive people of choice and you often deprive them of motivation.

Internal motivation is the most satisfying, as illustrated by a woman who wrote me to relate an incident.

> "I purchased some items at the grocery store. When I was about to take the bags out of the cart to put them in my car, I noticed I had a small lime clutched in my hand that I had forgotten to put on the conveyor belt; so I hadn't paid for it.
>
> "At ten for $1, it would have cost ten cents. My first thought was that I didn't want to walk all the way back to a cashier for ten cents. The store wouldn't miss that meager amount. Nevertheless, I pulled a dime from my purse and walked back to the nearest cashier. I handed it to her, explaining what I had done. She replied by saying, 'God bless you for your honesty.'
>
> "I cannot adequately express how I felt doing the right thing, simply because it was the right thing to do. I felt so much better than if I had driven away without paying the ten cents."

Although morality, ethics, and character attributes are often associated with a person's motivation, I am concerned only that you *understand the difference between your being actuated by an external influence or an internal one.*

KEY POINTS

- Technically, *all* motivation emanates from within a person, but we use different terms to express different concepts.

- *External* motivation is the term used in this book when referring to an influence from outside a person.

- *Internal* motivation is the term used when referring to a prompt solely emanating from inside a person.

- We operate from both internal and external motivation.

Part I

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Assumptions impact thinking, which in turn impacts both emotions and stress levels. Being mindful of assumptions and the relationship between thinking and feelings can assist in reducing stress. Understanding the difference between internal and external motivation empowers people to make more responsible decisions, which in turn can reduce stress.

SUMMARY

Assumptions are beliefs taken for granted. Wrong assumptions can lead to mistakes and grief. Becoming aware of assumptions reduces stress.

Generally, people make one of two assumptions when working with others. One is that people need to be coerced; the other is that people can be influenced without pressure. The former is referred to as Theory X, the latter as Theory Y. Theory X increases stress, whereas approaches that are based on Theory Y decrease stress.

The brain and body are so intertwined that one automatically influences the other. How we think has a direct connection to how we feel. The physical health and condition of our bodies also affects our thinking, feeling, and levels of stress.

The term "motivation" is used in a variety of ways in order to differentiate what prompts people to act. *Internal* motivation is the more commonly used term that refers to any motivation arising from any prompt inside a person. In contrast, *external* motivation refers to any prompt arising from sources outside a person.

CONCLUSION

Understanding three concepts assists in reducing stress. The first has to do with being aware of our assumptions. The second is the realization that our

thinking has a direct impact on our feelings and bodily health. The third is recognizing whether our motivation is prompted from within us or from some external influence.

The more we acknowledge the source of our motivations, the more we become empowered to have control of our stress. The reason is simple. We can control only what we acknowledge.

Part II

PRACTICES THAT REDUCE STRESS

Positivity

Choice

Reflection

Part II
Introduction

PRACTICES THAT REDUCE STRESS

Folks are usually about as happy as they make their minds up to be.
—Abraham Lincoln

We understand so far how assumptions can create anxiety, how feelings can affect our body and health, and how we can be mindful of our motivation. We are now ready to learn three practices that enhance the management of our world. These practices can significantly make our life more enjoyable, improve relationships, and increase our effectiveness in influencing others. In a nutshell, they can increase our happiness while reducing our stress.

The first of the three practices is *positivity*. We know that we do better when we feel good, as contrasted to doing good when feeling bad. With this in mind, Chapter 4, *Positivity*, teaches us how to talk to ourselves in positive ways and also to communicate in a positive way with others. We learn how positivity is so much more effective and powerful than negativity.

The second practice is the use of *choice*. We learn that regardless of the situation that we cannot change, or an external stimulus where we usually act reflexively, or an internal impulse or urge, we still have the freedom to choose our responses. Because we have this ability, we never need to feel as victims. In short, *choice empowers,* as highlighted in Chapter 5, *Choice.*

The third practice, *reflection*, is discussed in Chapter 6. Reflection is essential for enjoying the journey of life because it engenders self-evaluation, the critical component for change and an essential ingredient for happiness. Perhaps Stephen Covey, author of *"The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People,"* made the point most succinctly when he wrote, "In all my experiences, I have never seen lasting solutions to problems, lasting happiness and success, that came from the outside in."

4
Positivity

There is little difference in people, but that little difference makes a big difference. The little difference is attitude. The big difference is whether it is positive or negative.
—W. Clement Stone

Whether positive or negative, our thoughts trigger emotions. This chapter is designed to help you develop an attitude that will significantly reduce negative emotions that prompt stress.

Life is a conversation. How we communicate with ourselves has a direct effect on the enjoyment of life. The reason is that the most influential person we talk with all day is ourself, and what we tell ourself has a direct bearing on our behavior, our performance, and our influence on others. In fact, a good case can be made that our thoughts and self-conversations create our reality. Many experts have argued that by thinking negatively we promote mental and physical stress. Therefore, learning how to make lemonade from any "sour lemon" is the first principal to practice. We refer to it as *positivity*.

OUR THOUGHTS AFFECT OUR FEELINGS

One of the great approaches to successful living and a key strategy for reducing stress is to develop the art of prompting positive mindsets. For example, suppose I lay a plank on the ground. Almost anyone can easily walk on the plank from one end to the other. But if I were to raise the plank 10 feet off the ground, how many people do you think would walk across successfully? I would guess quite a few people might be hesitant to attempt crossing or might even fall off while walking on the raised plank.

Why can people walk the plank when it's on the ground but not while it's elevated? A prime reason is that when the plank is on the ground, people imagine success. They believe they can accomplish the task. Off the ground, there is a tendency to question the success of the endeavor.

Your mindset is vital. What you think, visualize, and imagine (to a large degree) make up what you are—just like the eagle that thought he was a chicken. As the story goes, a young boy found an eagle's nest while climbing in the mountains near his father's farm. He removed an egg from the nest and placed it under a hen back at the farm. The egg hatched along with the other eggs, so all his young life the eagle was raised among chickens. Knowing no better, he came to see himself as a chicken.

Then one day an adult eagle flew over the chicken coop. As the young one watched this great magnificent eagle fly higher and higher, the thought came to him that he, too, would like to soar high. With a burst of inspiration, the young eagle flew to the top of the chicken coop. From there he soared to the top of a low hillside. As his confidence grew, he soared higher and higher.

What we *think* has a direct impact on how we feel and often on how we act. First comes the thinking, followed by the feeling. In other words, *what we feel is the result of what we think.* For example, think about being late for a job interview. Just visualizing this situation prompts feelings of anxiety. Upon arriving late for the interview, you discover that the schedule is running late and you have not missed your appointment after all. Notice that in both instances—thinking about being late and then thinking about not being late—you responded first with a thought, which was then immediately followed by an emotion.

OUR SELF-TALK CREATES OUR REALITY

Mark Twain in his older years stated, "I am an old man and have known a great many troubles, but most of them never happened."

Our self-talk is filtered in response to both internal and external stimuli. Our thinking is internal, while stimuli to our senses are external. We are affected by what we *see*, what we *hear*, what we *touch*, what we *taste*, and what we *smell*. For example, seeing *scenes* in a movie arouses feelings. *Hearing* someone yell at us arouses feelings. *Touching* a hot stove arouses feelings. *Tasting* a lemon arouses feelings. For coffee drinkers, *smelling* a fresh brew upon waking in the morning arouses feelings. Just imagining something can prompt the same feeling as an actually event. The same goes with our self-talk.

Henry David Thoreau put it this way: *"It's not what you look at that matters. It's what you see."* The important point here is that we can develop positive self-talk just by being aware of our nonconscious filtering system.

Many psychologists assert that negative thinking—including labeling something as negative or perceiving something as unmanageable—promotes our own stress. Because we have the power to change our thinking, we also have the ability to alter our emotions. Neuroscientists have discovered that our thoughts can alter the physical structure in the gray matter of our brain. *In other words, the brain and our physiology change as a result of the thoughts we give it.*

Thinking in negative terms is natural for many people. For instance, let's return to the example in the first chapter about assumptions and the scenario that your supervisor asks you to stop by the office before leaving for the day. When I queried people in my presentations around the world, their thoughts almost always sounded something like, "I wonder what I did wrong?" In effect, they would anticipate the meeting as a negative experience. Since people don't know what the conversation with the supervisor would have been about, such self-talk can prompt unnecessary stress and anxiety until the actual meeting.

Thankfully, self-talk need not be negative. The way you feel about the forthcoming meeting can be reframed by changing just one word. Compare the different feelings aroused from these two thoughts: (1) I *have* to see my supervisor vs. (2) I *get* to see my supervisor. To truly understand the effect between "*have to*" and "*get to*," apply both words to a variety of situations and feel the difference. Here are a few starters: "I have to go to the gym" vs. "I get to go to the gym." "I have to spend the evening with my in-laws" vs. "I get to spend the evening with my in-laws." "I have to attend the parent conference" vs. "I get to meet my child's teacher."

Performance, too, suffers when we engage in negative self-talk. Our efficiency plummets, and we begin to view ourselves as less capable. This leads us to see our lives as increasingly less manageable—less in control. As a result, our stress increases even more. The greater our stress, the greater our tendency to respond with further negative self-talk. The cycle continues until eventually we have self-talked our way right into a self-fulfilling prophecy as indicated in this old tale.

> A man was driving down a country road in his brother's car when a tire went flat. He looked in the trunk, but there was

> no tire jack. He decided he would have to borrow one, so he started to walk down the road looking for a house.
>
> The day was hot and humid, and as he walked along he became more and more negative in his thinking. "They may not have a jack that fits my car. And even if they do, they may not want to lend it to me. The people around here are probably not very friendly." When the man finally arrived at a house and knocked on the door, he immediately pronounced to the woman who opened it, "Keep your darn tire jack!"

We become happier and more effective when we choose thoughts that empower, rather than ones that weakens or constricts. A monkey knows to eat only the nourishing part of the banana and throw away the bitter peel. Yet, as humans, we absorb criticism, embarrassment, ridicule, and other negatives—some of which are our own creation! We often "chew on the peel" rather than ingest the nutritional part.

LABELING

The topic of labeling arose during a luncheon conversation with William Glasser, M.D., the eminent psychiatrist and creator/author of *Reality Therapy* and *Choice Theory*. Dr. Glasser posed to me the following question: "In baseball, when is an out an out? He then answered: only when the umpire calls it an out—and not before."

That conversation had a significant impact on how I began to think and act. First, I realized that other people's opinions became "wrong" only when I labeled them as such. The term "diversity" took on a new meaning for me. I started to listen to others with a more open attitude and began to acknowledge others' viewpoints more readily. Since my wife's opinions and our daughter's opinions are often so different from mine, I began to understand their points of view on various issues. I became more enlightened. Because I was expanding my awareness, I grew. I became a more effective listener and learner.

The second way the conversation impacted me relates to how I approach everyday situations. I began to realize that a bad situation was indeed bad only if I thought about it as bad. I could reduce my stress and empower

myself simply by how I *chose to think* of the situation. For example, a *problem* became reframed as a *challenge*. I also began to realize that how I responded to a situation was a direct result of how I thought about it.

If I viewed something as negative, it inevitably became negative. When I perceived the same situation as a challenge, I was less apt to think of myself as being a victim. Instead, I was surprised to feel a greater sense of empowerment. I found it better to think of the choice I had when reacting to the situation. *I learned to indulge my hopes—rather than listen to my fears.* I realized that, if I listened to my fears, perhaps I would never know how successful I could be.

INFERENCES

An inference is a thought or statement about the unknown. For example, if we see our best friend pound his fist on the table, swear, and throw a plate on the floor, we can infer that our friend is angry. If a stranger comes at me with a knife in his hand, I would infer that he means to do me harm. Inferences can be accurate or inaccurate, logical or illogical, justified or unjustified. In many instances, there is no significant difference between an inference and an assumption; the difference depends on the circumstances.

Inferences help us evaluate and make decisions; however, inferences can also lead to negative thinking, fears, and anxiety. As a young boy, I fell off a horse while riding bareback. I landed on my back. The air went out of my lungs and I couldn't breathe. I could have inferred that the next time I were to ride bareback on the horse I would have the same experience. But instead of that inference, I decided that if I did not get back on the horse, I would forever have a fear of riding. I have since ridden dozens of horses and truly enjoyed the experiences. Because I originally had a bad experience with a horse did not necessarily mean that I should have inferred I would have similar bad experiences in the future.

A corollary to understanding inferences is that you can never succeed in getting at the truth if you think that you know, ahead of time, what the truth ought to be.

POSITIVITY IS CONSTRUCTIVE; NEGATIVITY IS NOT

What we often think and say often becomes our habit. When our self-talk is negative, we have a tendency to communicate with others in a negative way.

Even the worst salesperson knows enough not to upset the customer. Yet, because we allow our emotions to direct us, we often ignore this commonsense approach and send alienating messages. You can easily tell if your communications are sending such messages if what you say *blames*, *complains*, *criticizes*, *nags*, *punishes*, or *threatens*.

Negativity can have long-lasting repercussions. One or two mean words can stay with a person forever. Contrast this to Mark Twain's words, *"I can live for two months on a good compliment."*

Thinking positively elevates the spirit and prompts encouragement. This type of thinking promotes feelings of being capable of handling challenges. Positivity creates hope and feelings of being valued and respected. This type of thinking triggers enthusiasm, capability, pride, and responsibility—none of which is triggered by negativity. Notice also that positive communications do not trigger defensiveness when we speak to others and are more effective in influencing a person to want to change. Therefore, if you want to influence others to do what you would like, *become conscious of phrasing your communications in positive terms.*

There is no empowerment more effective than *self-empowerment*. It enables us to redirect any thoughts or communications that are negative. When you become aware that a thought is negative, train your mind to silently respond with the directive, "*Pivot!"* Choose to redirect your thoughts. Once you learn to "pivot," you will likely find that reflecting on the positive can immediately turn around a negative emotion.

Continually ask yourself: "How can I communicate this message in a positive way?" For example, saying, "I have a bad temper," is disabling, whereas, "It would be in my own self-interest to ease up on my temper," prompts reflection and is enabling.

When thoughts are guided to focus on the positive and constructive, then the self is nourished and enriched. Self-worth is intangible, and much of its cause, as well as its effect, is a matter of choosing thoughts that expand and strengthen the human psyche—rather than constrict or weaken it.

Dale Carnegie, the author of the classic book, *"How to Win Friends and Influence People,"* was asked on a radio program to tell the most important lesson he'd learned.

> "The most important lesson I have ever learned is the stupendous importance of what we think, for our thoughts

> make us what we are. By changing our thoughts, we can change our life.
>
> "If we think happy thoughts, we will be happy. If we think miserable thoughts, we will be miserable. If we think fearful thoughts, we will be fearful. If we think sickly thoughts, we probably will be ill. If we think failure, we will fail. If we wallow in self-pity, everyone will want to shun us and avoid us. Am I advocating a Pollyanna attitude toward all our problems? No. Life isn't that simple. But I am advocating in the strongest terms that we assume a positive attitude instead of a negative one."

AVOID NEGATIVE LANGUAGE

"No" is a negative word that almost always provokes resistance. "No" is not meant to be flexible or compromising. It has a commanding aspect, is harsh, and builds reluctance. Instead of "no," think *"not yet"* because it doesn't carry the negative overtones that "no" connotes and therefore does not provoke the same resistance.

Imagine you have just arrived at a restaurant that does not take reservations. The lobby is full of people waiting to be seated. The host says to you, "I don't have any tables right now. You'll have to wait 30 minutes." Now picture the same situation again, except this time the host says to you, "I'll have a wonderful table for you in just half an hour." Notice the difference in how you perceived the information. The chances are greater that you'll wait to eat at the restaurant after hearing the second message.

PAINT POSITIVE PICTURES

If you want to reduce your stress, learn to paint positive pictures. When you start to think in terms of what you *do* want, rather than what you *do not* want, the practice becomes quite easy. It merely requires painting positive mental pictures. The brain thinks in pictures—not in words. Think for a moment about the last time you had a dream. Did the dream appear in words—or did your dream appear as in illusions, visions, images, or pictures? Being aware that the brain processes information in pictures can help

you become significantly more effective. Success depends upon the pictures you paint for yourself and about others.

The human brain not only thinks in visuals but also is very susceptible to suggestions. Just for a moment, *don't* think of a pretty white kitten with a red bow around its neck. Now *don't* think of a grey elephant with pink dots. *Don't* visualize the color blue. What did you visualize? Now, try to visualize "Don't." Can you?

Here's another example of the relationship between the visions we create—not only for ourselves but also for others. Although there was nothing physiologically wrong, a young son was still wetting his bed. After tucking the boy in, the father said, "Now, don't wet your bed tonight." What do you think the child visualized as he fell asleep? After I related this scenario to a group of parents, a young superintendent of schools related the following incident to me the next morning about his three-year-old son who was still wetting his bed. Notice how a positive picture was painted.

> "Before putting my son to bed last night, I first led him to the bathroom as I usually do. Then after I tucked him in and kissed him goodnight, my last words to him were, 'Let's see if we can keep the bed dry tonight.'
>
> "As soon as he got out of bed this morning, he came running to me, calling, 'Come, look, Daddy. See, my bed is dry!'"

The story of a banker who dropped a coin in a beggar's cup further illustrates the point of painting empowering pictures.

> Each morning the banker would take one of the beggar's pencils and say, "You are a merchant, and I always expect to receive good value from the merchants with whom I do business."
>
> This daily routine went on for some time, but one day the street beggar was gone. Time passed and the banker forgot about him.
>
> Years later, the banker walked by a little store and there was the former beggar—now a shopkeeper! The shopkeeper said,

> "I always hoped you might someday come by. You are largely responsible for my being here. You kept telling me I was a merchant. I started to think of myself in that way, instead of as a beggar looking for handouts. I started selling pencils—lots of them—and today I have a little business. You showed me respect and influenced me to look at myself differently."

Andrew Carnegie, the first great industrialist in America, at one point had a number of millionaires working for him. A reporter asked him how he hired all of those millionaires. His answer was that they were not millionaires when he hired them. Carnegie stated that you develop people the same way you mine gold. He said, "You go into a gold mine and you expect to remove tons of dirt to find an ounce of gold. But you don't go into the mine looking for the dirt; you go in there looking for the gold."

Ed Scannell, Past President of the National Speakers Association, taught retailing at Arizona State University. Every summer J.C. Penney, the great retailer, would stay at the Camelback Inn and would speak to Ed's retailing class. In one session, a student inquired about Mr. Penny's advancing years—whether or not his diminishing eyesight was hindering him. J.C. Penny replied, "It's not as good as it used to be, but my vision has never been better."

One salesgirl in a candy store always had customers lined up waiting while other salesgirls stood around. The owner of the store noted her popularity and asked for her secret. "It's easy," she said. "The other girls scoop up more than a pound of candy and then start subtracting some. I always scoop up less than a pound and then add to it." People are like magnets. They are drawn to the positive and are repelled by the negative. Not only is this an important principle to understand when working with others but it will also reduce your own stress. People who are effective in influencing other people phrase their communications in positive terms.

Painting positive pictures, thinking in positive ways, and using positive vocabulary with yourself and others is the first of three practices to live without stress.

KEY POINTS

- ❖ Positivity is constructive and empowering.

- Thoughts have a direct bearing on feelings.
- Our self-talk creates our reality.
- Words influence stress levels.
- Paint positive pictures.

5
Choice

Everything can be taken but one thing: to choose one's attitude in any set of circumstances.
–Viktor Frankl

Feeling a loss of control is a critical factor in developing stress. This chapter demonstrates how to reduce stress by always staying in control through the empowerment of choice.

Choice-Response Thinking can be classified as a paradigm shift, a metanoia, or "thinking out of the box." In essence, it is a complete mind shift of thinking regarding human behavior and control. Understanding this type of thinking is one of the most valuable thinking patterns a person can use to reduce stress and improve one's personal and professional life. We learn that in any *situation*, because of any *stimulus*, or with any *impulse* or *urge*, we still have the opportunity to stay in control because we have the *freedom and power to choose our responses.*

CHOICE-RESPONSE THINKING

Situation

I was comfortably seated in an airplane ready for takeoff on a flight back to California. I had just started reading a book when the pilot announced there would be a two-hour delay; Los Angeles International Airport was fogged in. After a few minutes of additional reading, I gazed up from my book and discovered that I was one of the few passengers who had not deplaned. Even with a good read, adding two-hours to the three-hour flight seemed too long to remain seated. I left my materials, already in the overhead storage compartment, and returned to the airport terminal. After a half-hour of strolling and shopping, the thought occurred to me that, if the fog in Los Angeles lifted, the plane might take off sooner than the two-hour announced time. I quickly returned to the loading area just in time to watch my plane depart—with my coat, seminar materials, and luggage.

This was a *situation* I could have avoided if I had not gone strolling and had stayed in the passenger loading area. Although at that moment I could not change my situation, *I could still choose my response.* Getting angry would have been useless. I checked the departure schedule, arranged for a later flight to Los Angeles, and told a service agent that my belongings were on the departed plane. Upon arrival in Los Angeles, I found my coat, materials, and luggage waiting for me, and I felt pleased that I had taken a rational approach to the entire situation.

We all experience situations that are beyond our control, either momentarily or permanently. We are confronted with weather and other natural forces, with inconveniences, unpleasant assignments, unrewarding family or work relationships, and numerous situations that we cannot change. However, *we can always choose our responses to these situations.*

Victor Frankl, the psychiatrist who survived Nazi death camps, experienced situations beyond his control. Yet, he taught that a person has the *power to choose his thinking*—his independence of mind—even in the most terrible conditions of psychic and physical stress. Although conditions such as lack of sleep, insufficient food, and various mental stresses suggest that the concentration camp captives were bound to react in certain ways, in the final analysis it became clear that the sort of person the prisoner became was the result of an inner decision, rather than the result of camp influences only. Even under such extreme circumstances, Frankl taught *"A person still has one freedom: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way."*

Stimulus

In addition to having the freedom to make a choice for any situation, we can learn that we also have the freedom to make a choice after something *stimulates* us. When a parent smiles at the infant, the infant smiles back. Such stimuli become less "automatic" with growth, as when the parent smiles at the teenager, but the teenager does not reciprocate with a like facial expression.

In the Chapter 2, *The Brain-Body Connection,* we learned that our initial response to answering a ringing telephone, seeing who is at the door when the bell rings, or stopping at a red light are responses to stimuli. To review the point: None of these *makes* a person do anything. Consciously or nonconsciously, we choose our responses to stimuli. The harm comes

when, by extrapolation, we *assume* that an outside force or person *causes* our behavior or makes us take an action.

This was the situation during surgery when a very competent nurse was asked for a particular instrument but handed it to the surgeon a moment later than the surgeon expected it. The brilliant surgeon, who lacked people skills, turned to the nurse and berated her. Needless to say, the nurse's day was not very bright. For the rest of the day, she constantly thought how the surgeon "made" her angry. She also thought about the situation while driving home and related the story to her husband who inquired what time the incident occurred. She said that it took place around nine o'clock that morning. Her husband then inquired, "What time is it now?" She responded, "Seven o'clock." The husband said, "You're telling me this incident took place ten hours ago and the surgeon is still *making* you angry!"

The nurse's original thinking was that the surgeon *caused* her to be angry. Obviously, his action *prompted* a feeling but did not *cause* her to react as she did. The nurse decided never again to give that surgeon the power to control her day, ride in her car, or be invited into her home.

We regularly encounter experiences that prompt feelings and which can lead to stress, but they need not control us. Let's start with a situation that may be familiar to you. Assume that while driving, you find yourself stuck in a traffic jam that will make you late for an important appointment. You feel yourself getting angry and your self-talk sounds something like, "This traffic is making me so angry!" In reality, however, the traffic does not care. You are allowing yourself to become angry—to become emotionally hijacked. This is simply a situation that stimulates and prompts an emotion.

Even after receiving a stimulus, an instant passes wherein a person can decide upon a response. Referring to this traffic example, you could choose to turn on the radio, think of a pleasant memory, play a CD, or pivot to any thought that redirects your thinking. The reason that the anger would dissipate—and to help you remember a key learning from this book—is that *emotion always follows cognition*. You have the ability to choose your response to any *situation*, no matter how unpleasant the situation may be.

Impulse

We also have the freedom to choose our response to an *impulse* or *urge*. Infants are given diapers to wear because they are not yet able to control their natural urges. As we grow, diapers are no longer needed; we learn to

respond to our physiological urges. The same is true for our emotional impulses.

Regardless of the situation, the stimulus, or the impulse, people choose their responses. To do otherwise would mean that we operate from compulsion. Jeffry Schmitt, a UCLA psychiatrist, refers to the beauty of being human, and not a rat or monkey. The difference is that we humans need not succumb to our emotions every single time. The less we succumb, the less we are bothered by tyrannical obsessions.

The following summarizes *choice-response thinking:*

THINK> CHOICE > RESPONSE

SITUATION > CHOICE > RESPONSE
(Information)

STIMULUS > CHOICE > RESPONSE
(From outside)

IMPULSE > CHOICE > RESPONSE
(From within)

Choice-response thinking requires a complete mind shift. We become responsible when we understand that in any situation, with any stimulus, or with any impulse or urge, we still have the opportunity to choose a response—and that *excuses are not justifications.* This understanding may be one of the most valuable thinking patterns we can use to reduce stress and improve our personal as well as our professional lives.

Because we have the freedom and ability to choose our responses, it must therefore follow that we are responsible for own choices. With this realization, self-control is naturally encouraged and has a liberating effect. We no longer need to suffer feelings of helplessness or victimization.

VICTIMHOOD

Victim-type thinking is counterproductive to engendering control. Examples of such thinking can be heard in comments such as, "He made me do it," "I couldn't control myself," "I couldn't help it," "I had no choice," and "What he said offended me." *Merely being aware that such thinking relinquishes control is empowering.*

Assume for a moment that you are back in school. You look at the math test that was just returned to you and see a number of problems that were marked, "incorrect." Your self-talk sounds something like, "I guess that I'm just not good in math." Now, let's repeat the scenario with a slightly different twist. You are back in school. You look at the math test that was just returned to you and see a number of problems that were marked, "incorrect." Your self-talk this time sounds something like, "I guess that I'll have to study more."

In the first illustration, you saw a flaw in yourself, something beyond your control. That self-talk engenders pessimism, giving up, and no longer trying. In the second illustration, you acted like an optimist, someone whose self-conversation was, "I guess that means I should have studied more." You envisioned a setback as something *over which you have control.* The critical difference between optimistic thinking and pessimistic thinking has to do with the *perception of control*, which, in turn, depends upon perception of choice. We feel psychologically healthy when we believe we have choices.

Research on the value of choice is solid. Our brain generates different chemicals when we feel optimistic and in control than when we feel pessimistic and without control or power. *Choice, control,* and *responsibility* are so woven together that one significantly affects the others. Make a choice, and control is enhanced. Fail to choose, and control is diminished. The more we choose to be responsible, the more control that follows. Deny responsibility, and control is given up.

People who regard themselves as victims do not see themselves as being in control and often see the world as unfair to them in particular. Whatever happens in their lives appears to happen *to* them—as if they have no choice over their responses. Victimhood people are often angry. People who have chosen to regard themselves as victims cannot allow themselves to be happy because being happy challenges their perceptions as victims.

To emphasize the point: Language shapes our thinking, particularly when it comes to self-talk. Taking conscious control of inner chat can act

like a magic wand to shift us to more empowering mental states. Victimhood is the result of thinking of outside forces rather than internal responses. Common thinking patterns are: "Someone else is at fault," "Something else caused my behavior; I am not responsible for it," and "I'm a victim." We can teach ourselves to self-talk in enabling and self-empowering ways. Phrases such as "prompts me" and "stimulates me" can be substituted for the powerless "made me" and "caused me." Additional words that reduce "victimhood" thinking and are empowering are "influence," "persuade," "arouse," "irritate," "annoy," "pique," and "provoke." These words do not give away power; they merely describe the effect on oneself.

Another strategy to reduce powerlessness is to change adjectives into verbs. Notice the difference between, "I am *angering*," vs. "I am angry." As soon as we phrase our experiences in the language of action—in a verbal form—we immediately become aware that we are making a choice.

Instead of thinking, "The task is too difficult," we can learn to take charge of our thoughts. Eliminate the words "too" and substitute the word "challenging" for "difficult." Thus, the task is no longer "difficult"—instead it's "challenging." Do you feel the empowering effect of this simple strategy?

Another, more subtle language pattern is the ill use of the word "try." For example, imagine asking someone with whom you are working, "Try to be more helpful." The person may or may not comply. In contrast, by asking the person to *be* more helpful, it is implied that the person will perform as requested. "Try" merely conveys an attempt. Self-talk should convey commitment. A person does not get out of bed by *trying* to get out of bed or make a phone call by *trying* to call. We get out of bed and we make a call. This type of self-talk is the hallmark of success. As Henry Ford so aptly put it, *"If you think you can, you can; if you think you can't, you can't. Either way you are right."*

It is no kindness to treat ourselves as helpless, inadequate, or as a victim—regardless of what has happened to us. We owe it to ourselves to be kind by treating ourselves in a way that encourages and empowers us not to cede control to situations, stimulations, or urges. Stress is reduced when we control our decisions.

KEY POINTS

- ❖ We constantly make choices—consciously and nonconsciously.

- We can choose our responses to situations, stimulations, and urges.
- Victimhood thinking is a choice.
- Choice ends when life ends.

6
Reflection

Learning is not compulsory, but neither is survival.
–W. Edwards Deming

Now that you are consciously talking to yourself in positive rather than in negative terms and are managing your choices, we turn to the third critical practice, *reflection*. This practice reinforces the other two practices of *positivity* and *choice*. *Reflection* is the critical component for change and an essential ingredient for both reducing stress and increasing happiness. Its absence can be likened to chewing—but not swallowing. The food is tasted, but unless digested, there is no nutritional value. In fact, no one really learns from an actual experience. *It is the reflection about the experience that generates learning.* The human brain is a meaning-seeking organism, and because much of what we are exposed to happens so fast, we need time to process, to internalize its meaning. In addition, the brain continues to process information long after we are aware of it. This is the reason why many of our ideas seem to "pop out of the blue."

The key to reflection is the skill of asking *self-reflective* questions. This is the most effective, yet most neglected, strategy in handling stress and in leading and managing others. In fact, *the questions themselves are often more important than the answers.*

REFLECTION AND EVALUATIVE QUESTIONS

The key to fostering self-evaluation is exemplified in the story of two sisters who lived together. The sisters got along pretty well, but on one particular day they locked horns. While the older sister was washing some dishes, the younger sister walked into the kitchen and took the last orange out of the fruit basket. The older sister said, "Hold it. That's my orange." The younger sister said, "Sorry, I have it now." They argued back and forth and forth and back. However, instead of continuing the argument, they put together a

relatively creative solution. The older sister cut the orange in half, and the younger sister took first choice of which half of the orange she wanted.

That would have been a fair, practical, creative, and good solution—but not the best for what the sisters wanted. Before the orange was cut in half, the older sister asked the younger sister the reason she wanted the orange. The younger sister replied, "I want to squeeze it to make orange juice." The younger sister, in turn, asked her older sister, "Why do *you* want the orange?" "I want to grate the rind for baking," she replied. Both realized that their desires could be met. By inquiring, *by asking*, each sister obtained double what each would have received from the original agreement.

The word, "question," originates from the Latin root, "quaestio," which means, "to seek." It is this questioning process—or seeking—that starts the thinking process. Asking questions seems simple, but the types of questions that foster reflection to handle stress are of a particular kind and require learning a skill. We give ourselves a gift with these types of questions because they foster clarity of thought. Reflective questions are adventurous. Consider the positive effect of questions such as:

- How can I best respond to that?
- What can I do to accomplish this?
- If I knew that I could not fail, what would I do?
- How can I prevent that urge from directing my behavior?
- What would be the best approach to handle this situation?
- If I were to give it an extraordinary effort, what would I do?

These types of questions assist in reducing stress because they empower us with a sense of control.

If we are attempting to influence someone else, then asking questions is a quick way to obtain and understand perceptions and viewpoints. Asking reflective questions of others empowers them because the ideas that people support the most are their own. It's really quite simple: People generally do not argue with their own decisions.

Ownership is a critical component for self-evaluation and change. The "Psychologist's Paradox" applies here. A patient comes in to see a psychologist, and in the very first session the psychologist sees exactly what is wrong with the patient. If the psychologist tells the patient at that point what is wrong, the chance that it will lead to change is very small. However, if

(even if takes many sessions) the patient "discovers" the solution to the problem her/himself, the likelihood for change is much greater.

If I have a project on which I have worked but am not satisfied yet, or a presentation that I thought could have been improved, or something I did or said that prompted anger in my wife, here is the key question that I ask myself: *What can I learn from this?*

Asking this type of reflective question has a number of advantages:

- It directs thinking.
- It fosters clarification and articulation.
- It encourages both creativity and buy-in.

Reflective questions have the following characteristics:

- They are framed to fit a specific situation.
- They focus on the *present* or *future*, as opposed to the past.
- They are open-ended and require more than a "Yes" or "No" response.
- They usually start with "What?" or "How?"—and rarely start with "Why?"

Ask "closed" questions (those that can be answered with "yes" or "no") only if they lead to self-inquiry or self-examination.

- Can I do better? *(Possibly followed up with "Yes; how?")*
- Is what I am doing working? (*If not, why not? How could I have done it differently?)*
- Am I taking the responsible course?
- Is what I am choosing to do getting me what I want?
- Am I willing to try something different from what I have been doing?

Here are some examples of reflective questions for specific situations:

Four critical questions for changing behavior:

- What do I *want*?
- What am I *choosing* to do?

If what I chose to do is not getting me what I want, then

- What is my plan?
- What are my procedures to implement the plan?

Questions to help get on task:

- What do I like to do that I can apply to this task?
- If I want to stay on task, what should I be doing?
- Does what I am doing help me accomplish the task?

Questions for *commitment:*

- What am I going to do to make it happen?
- On a scale of 1 to 10, how would I rank my commitment to it?
- In the realm of all things possible, can I keep my commitment?

Questions for improving quality:

- How does that look?
- What would I like to improve even more?
- If there were no limitations, how could I do it even better?

A habit is most easily changed by replacing it with another. Therefore, when you have a temptation to self-talk by *telling* something to yourself (which is our usual habit), think: *"Will I be more effective if I ask a question?"* You will be amazed at its effectiveness.

Effective reflective questions require a thinking response. Questions do not need to end with a question mark. For example, "Please describe to me. . . ." is an effective clarification question.

POTHOLES

Again, *the quality of the answers depends on the quality of the questions.* This is extremely important and cannot be overemphasized! Avoid asking "Why?" questions. Many times you may not know or want to admit to yourself the real reason for your motivation. Besides, such a question gives you an open highway to avoid taking responsibility. All you need is to create an excuse—and responsibility is relinquished. Moreover, even if the "why" were to be known, articulating the explanation with any accuracy is very difficult. Most important, however, asking a "Why?" question—contrary to

common thinking—has little effect on resolving an issue. Knowing *why* you became angry has little do with not letting your emotions overtake you in the future. *Knowing the reason is interesting but has little effect on changing behavior.*

QUESTIONS AS STRESS REDUCERS

When practicing any skill, putting ourselves in the proper position always precedes any action. We hold a golf club in a certain way before the swing, we position ourself before playing the first note of a musical instrument, and we buckle the seat belt before we start to drive our car. This also holds true when asking reflective questions. Start with taking a deep breath of air; this simple procedure will help remember to pause and *ask a reflective question.* Stress is reduced when we ask self-evaluative, reflective questions.

THE SKILL

As with any skill, you will feel awkward at first, but the more you practice asking reflective questions, the more comfortable you become, the more confidence you develop, and the more effective you are. In addition, regardless of how often the strategy is used, it is still effective because the strategy is noncoercive and empowering.

Thinking about a skill is not practicing it. Thinking is necessary for focus, but only the actual asking of reflective questions will give you the skill. With this in mind, the question was asked, "How do you develop the skill?" Answered the sage, "With experience." "But," asked the disciple, "How do you get the experience?" Came the answer, "By asking poor questions."

Each question asked is a learning experience and, if the desired result is not obtained, it should be thought of as *feedback, not failure*. This approach not only applies to you and your experiences but also applies to most human interactions—be it in social situations, business, parenting, education, or business.

Reflective questions should always focus on the future. The past cannot be changed. Besides, today is the tomorrow we dreamed about yesterday. Stay in the present and plan for the future to reduce stress.

KEY POINTS

- Reflection is critical for learning how to reduce stress.
- Asking yourself reflective questions is a skill that you can learn.
- The quality of the answer depends on the quality of the question.
- Asking yourself reflective questions is empowering.
- Start with "What?" or "How?"—rather than "Why?"
- Focus the question on the present and future, not the past.

Part II

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

An expedition of scientists went on a mission to capture a Tonkin snub-nosed monkey. Only an estimated 100-200 of this particular species exists, and they reside only in the jungles of Vietnam. The objective was to capture one of the monkeys alive and unharmed.

Using their knowledge of monkeys, the scientists devised a trap consisting of a small bottle with a long narrow neck. A handful of nuts was placed in it, and the bottle was staked out and secured by thin wires attached to a tree. Sure enough, one of the desired monkeys scented the nuts in the bottle, thrust an arm into the long neck, and grabbed a fistful. But when the monkey tried to withdraw the prize, his fist—now made larger by its contents—would not pass through the narrow neck of the bottle. He was trapped, anchored in the bottle, unable to escape with his booty, and yet unwilling to let go of it. The monkey was easily captured.

We may smile at such foolishness, but in some respects humans often tend to operate in the same manner. We cling to the very things that hold us back, remaining captive through sheer unwillingness to let go. So often people fail because of what they will not give up. They cling to what has always worked—clearly after it has stopped working.

SUMMARY

Practicing the principles of *positivity, choice, and reflection* reduce stress while simultaneously improving relationships—a necessary ingredient for achieving greater results.

Negative comments engender negative attitudes. Positive comments engender positive attitudes. People who are effective in reducing stress phrase their communications in positive terms. Positivity brings hope. In addition, *positivity* results in fostering us to feel valued, enthusiastic, supported, respected, motivated, challenged, capable, and proud.

Either consciously or nonconsciously, people *choose* their attitudes and responses to any situation, stimulus, or impulse. *Choice-response thinking*—the understanding that we can always exercise control and need not be victims—may be one of the most valuable thinking patterns we can employ.

Reflection is a powerful strategy for handling stress. It is also the most effective approach for bringing about change because reflection engenders self-evaluation, which is both noncoercive and empowering. Asking self-evaluating questions is a skill that is only developed through practice.

CONCLUSION

Implementing the three practices until they become habits is the most powerful approach to reducing stress and enjoying life's journey. This mindset requires letting go of ineffective approaches that you may have been using for years. When first implementing these three life changing and stress reducing practices, you will feel uneasy—until you have practiced them enough to make new neural brain connections that form new habits. Implement now; you can refine later.

Part III

APPLICATIONS THAT REDUCE STRESS

Procedures

Impulse Control

Modalities

Part III
Introduction

APPLICATIONS THAT REDUCE STRESS

Creating and using procedures are critical keys to efficiency.
—Marvin Marshall

When the practices of positivity, choice, and reflection become our default, we will be well on the road to living without stress. We now turn to three applications—solutions to particular situations.

The first of the three applications refers to *procedures*. Developing procedures is perhaps the simplest and most effective approach to prevent stress. Whether we realize it or not, our lives are directed by the procedures we use. The trick is to be mindful of them in order to control them. This is explained in Chapter 7, *Procedures.*

The second application refers to *impulse control*, a technique that, if you learn and practice it, will do more than anything else to help you maintain control. This technique can be used to intervene at the moment our cognition prompts an emotion—before we get to the point that we become emotionally hijacked. Implementing the impulse management procedure described in Chapter 8, *Impulse Control*, will relieve both your aggravation and your stress.

The third application described in Chapter 9, *Modalities*, has to do with becoming aware of *how* we are smart and a way to understand ourselves and also to understand others. When we are aware of modalities, frustrations are reduced along with the amount of stress we encounter.

7
Procedures

Developing procedures is one of the simplest and most effective approaches to prevent stress.
—Marvin Marshall

One of the most perceptive comments ever made to me was spoken in an elevator. I was at a conference and the person sharing the elevator commented to me, "We run our life by procedures." This thought immediately prompted me to think of *kaizen,* a Japanese word that comes from *"kai"* meaning *"continuous"* and "zen" meaning "*improvement"* or *"wisdom."* The core of Kaizen is about making small steps that result in continuous improvements. "SMALL" is the key word. A familiar aphorism states this idea succinctly: *Small strokes fell great oaks.* By creating a procedure for anything that bothers me, regardless of how small it may be, I can be in control and reduce my stress.

CREATING A PROCEDURE

Here is an example I used in writing this book. I started by asking myself, "Of all my activities, which one holds the highest priority?" My response: writing this book. So I created small procedures. I started my day dressing in my yukata (Japanese kimono) that I purchased when I presented in Japan. This little gesture had me immediately feel ready to write. I then committed to writing for at least two hours before I opened up my email. You are reading the result of these procedures.

PROCEDURES CAN SAVE MONEY

Introductory note: I have my wife's permission to include this personal anecdote to make the point about the importance of creating and implementing procedures.

My wife oftentimes turns her computer off and leaves the room before the computer actually shuts down. "I'm a quick getaway gal" is her quip. I often suggested to her the procedure of staying in the room until the computer totally shuts down because sometimes she thinks it has when it hasn't.

Here is another situation in our home that called for a procedure in order to deal with it. The faucet in our kitchen sink must be pulled down vertically; otherwise, the faucet drips. My suggestion to the love of my life was to look at the faucet after the handle is pulled down to be sure there is not any dripping—before making her getaway.

A few years ago, the quick getaway gal left our upstairs bathroom faucet running. Later, I called from downstairs and suggested she join me to watch the rain coming from the ceiling. She flew upstairs to turn off the bathroom faucet. A little procedure such as checking to be sure that the water is turned off before leaving the area could have saved dollars—thousands! We found ourselves living in a motel for 77 days while the wet ceiling dried, the testing for asbestos completed, plastering and repainting, and all of our packed furniture moved from storage back to its previous location in our residence. I love my wife, so I just chalked it up to another of life's experiences.

PROCEDURES INCREASE EFFICIENCY

When I was in business and later a teacher, counselor, and administrator, I used procedures to become more efficient and for reducing any stress. For example, when I was teaching and a student did something that irked me, I would ask myself, "What procedure can I establish so it doesn't happen again?" The key to effective school classroom management is to create procedures for everything so that helpful routines and habits are established.

The task was really quite simple. For example, when I suddenly heard the pencil sharpener being used while I was talking, I taught a procedure. I simply had the student place the pencil in a raised hand. This indicated to me the desire to sharpen a pencil. When I was finished with the concept I was teaching, I nodded to the student indicating that this would be an appropriate time to sharpen the pencil. Similarly, when I heard the crumpling of paper, I asked myself, "What procedure can I establish to halt this bothersome noise?" I settled on teaching students to fold the paper lengthwise—like a hot dog. Folding the paper made no noise, could be placed flat on a

desk, and took up less room than crumpled paper in the waste paper basket that was circulated before the end of each period.

This concept of establishing procedures works in all walks of life—in factories (where safety is essential), in offices, in homes—anywhere and in any place where people want to become more efficient and thereby reduce their stress.

I have procedures regarding where I place my car keys and my smart phone, where I park my car in a parking structure, and for remembering my hotel room number. Most of us develop procedures without even realizing it. I always put my left foot into my slacks first. I never planned it; I just do it. This is how most of us live our lives most of the time. However, if you are mindful and plan procedures ahead of time, you become more efficient. I never have to spend time looking for my car keys, my smart phone, or finding my car or hotel room.

SIMPLE PROCEDURES

Here are two simple procedures that I use almost daily. I refer to the first as the two-minute procedure and the second as the five-minute procedure.

The Two-Minute Procedure

If you decide that an action can be accomplished in two minutes or less, do it—even if it is a low priority item. The reason that this approach increases effectiveness is rather simple. It will take longer to file it, retrieve it, and look at it again than it would be to deal with it when first encountered.

For example, because of my websites and articles on the Internet, I receive many emails on a daily basis. Much of it is spam. Yet, I do not want to delete it all unread, because inadvertently a question posed to me or a worthwhile message may not get through. So I use a "junk" list in my email system. One result is that, as my junk list grows, I receive fewer and fewer spam emails. This procedure allows me to leave all spam in my "junk box" and delete them—with great pleasure—all at once.

I think of the Two-Minute Procedure as Teflon coating. Nothing sticks to it. I do not let stuff hang around if I can quickly dispatch it. The key to using the procedure is that when something confronts you, ask yourself, "How long will this take?" If your response is two-minutes or less, attend to it.

The Five-Minute Procedure

She was a vibrant picture of health and an inspiring speaker. The audience was stunned to see a slide of her when she was morbidly obese. She had lost 125 pounds and spoke about how diet and exercise saved her life.

The question was asked, "What did she do when she wanted to go off her diet or when she didn't feel like exercising?" She described her "5-Minute Procedure." She explained that when she had a craving for something she knew she shouldn't eat, she told herself, "I CAN eat that, but I will wait 5 minutes." Invariably something happened in those 5 minutes that got her mind off food. She would make a phone call, check her email, write a note, or get involved in some activity. Sometimes, without getting involved in another activity, the craving went away on its own.

Whenever she didn't want to go to the gym to work out, she conducted a little negotiation with herself. She told herself that she would work out for 5 minutes and then renegotiate. Ten percent of the time, she walked out of the gym after the 5 minutes. Ninety per cent of the time, however, the 5 minutes of activity broke down her resistance and she continued her full workout session.

So for more responsible behavior, the next time you have a craving or are not in the mood for doing something you know you should, try the "5-Minute Procedure."

A SUUCCESSFUL RELATIONSHIP PROCEDURE

Here is a procedure my wife and I established many years ago on the first night of our marriage. The procedure is simple and like most new habits was difficult at first but became easier with time. As angry with each other as we might become, we agreed NEVER to go to *sleep* while still angry. Looking back, some of the talking out sessions became longer than others, but we have always held to this procedure that has served us so well. And the make-up sessions almost made the disagreements worthwhile.

The message of this chapter is succinct. When you have difficulty in any endeavor, develop a procedure to prevent or eliminate stress.

KEY POINTS

- ❖ Create and implement procedures to become more efficient.

- Procedures can be implemented in every phase of life.
- Implementing procedures reduces stress.

8
Impulse Control

Act reflectively, rather than reflexively.
—Marvin Marshall

Although we encounter experiences that prompt feelings that lead to stress, these feelings need not control us. Practicing impulse control gives us a tool to stay in control and reduce or eliminate stress.

A TOOL FOR IMPULSE CONTROL

Let's return to a situation mentioned earlier. Assume that you are in your car, stuck in a traffic jam, and that you will be late for an important appointment. You feel yourself getting angry and your self-talk sounds something like, "This traffic is making me so angry!" You are simply experiencing a situation that stimulates and prompts emotions. By allowing yourself to get angry, you become emotionally hijacked. Even after a stimulus, such as being stuck in traffic, an instant passes wherein a person can decide upon a response. We said that *you can choose your responses to situations—no matter how unpleasant the situation may be.* Let us refine the procedure even more.

Reflect, then react.

Visualize a traffic signal to use in redirecting your thinking. First, stop (RED in the signal), and then take a breath as if gasping. (It is impossible to gasp with a closed mouth.) Take a deep gasp a second time and notice that your jaw drops open and your tongue drops to the bottom of your mouth. This simple procedure of taking a gasp of air interrupts emotional tenseness in the nucleus of the trigeminal nerve located by the jaw. This is the nerve that communicates tension and stress throughout the body.

Now, inside the moment that it takes to gasp and release the tension, your mind has the opportunity to redirect thinking so you can consider options (YELLOW in the signal). Your options may include turning on your car radio, playing a CD, or perhaps thinking of plans for the coming weekend. Choose one (GREEN in the signal). This redirection of your thinking will immediately relieve the negative emotion. *The only sure way to relieve or change an emotion is to redirect your thoughts.*

If you have a tendency to get angry, learning this procedure through repeated practice will not only reduce the number of times you will become

angry but it will also reduce the intensity of your anger. The reason is that you will have made new neural connections in your brain. *This application needs to be practiced several times before it becomes habitual.*

This is not to deny that there are reflex actions like sneezing that are automatic. (Other examples include: you jump when a door slams, you feel scared when someone frightens you, and your anger erupts when a car suddenly cuts in front of you.). All human beings inherit a certain level of reactivity to both external and internal stimuli. Some of us are highly reactive, while others more easily can reduce the effects of certain amounts of incoming stimuli. As the brain matures, even highly reactive individuals tend to become less so. Reflexes are very important, for without them we would not function normally. The most basic reflex, the one that saves our lives—the so-called "freeze, fight, or flight" reflex—is readily recognized. When we lived in a less protected environment, a startle reflex was caused by the possibility of a very real danger in the form of a tiger, a snake, or a spear. In order to survive against predators, we had to make an instant decision whether to stay and fight or run away. Those who froze usually didn't see the next day. The situation engendered reflex thinking but even then involved some choice in response.

Sometime we allow ourselves to become angry, as in the traffic jam scenario described above. Even so, there is a moment before the emotion takes over—before we become emotionally hijacked—when we have an opportunity to *choose* a response. Once we train ourselves to become aware of this brief moment of opportunity, we become more able to decide what our response will be. Responses undoubtedly occur, but the how, when, or where is often our choice.

A CRITICAL UNDERSTANDING

You cannot stop an emotion directly!

You may have heard someone say, "You shouldn't feel that way." But the person cannot help it. I repeat to emphasize the point: No human can directly stop an emotion. However, there is a way—a rock solid way—to control emotions, as shared by my experience below. I suggest that you visualize the scenario so it will go into long-term memory.

One day when I was an elementary school principal, a kindergarten teacher contacted the office for assistance with a youngster having a crying fit. I reached into my bag of tricks and pulled out a stethoscope given to me by

a physician. I placed it around my neck and hurried to the kindergarten room. I approached the crying child, knelt down to his level, looked him in the eyes, put the listening ends of the stethoscope in my ears, and then placed the end of the stethoscope to three places on the child's chest. After just a few seconds, I proclaimed the boy to be healthy. The crying immediately stopped.

What I did was simple and the only way to change an emotion. *I redirected the youngster's attention.* Be focusing on the stethoscope, the emotion was immediately changed.

The strategy of redirecting attention is a powerful way to change an emotion. To emphasize: *Emotion always follows cognition.* If you want to change an emotion, redirect thinking.

This same diversionary phenomenon can be seen with teenagers. An adolescent girl is having an argument with her mother. The phone rings; it is one of the teenager's friends. The daughter's tone of voice immediately changes; it is suddenly friendly, even sweet. Upon termination of the call, the girl's previous surge of emotion with the parent reappears—proving that by redirecting their attention, even teenagers can control their tempers. I personally witnessed this experience between our daughter and my wife.

There is nothing new about how mood follows thought. My grandmother knew this, which is the reason she said to my mother, "If you're in a bad mood, here is what I want you to do: *'Clean the stove'."* As my mother related the incident to me, when she was cleaning the stove her focus was on that activity, which in turn, prompted a mood change.

KEY POINTS

- Having a procedure for impulse control reduces stress.
- You cannot stop an emotion directly.
- Emotion always follows cognition.
- The only way to stop an emotion is to redirect thinking.

9
Modalities

We are smart in different ways and learn in different modalities.
—Marvin Marshall

Our stress levels increase when we try to do something that we are not capable of doing. Stress is also increased when we attempt to learn something but are not successful. When we become aware of *how* we are smart and our *own* best way to learn, our frustrations are reduced along with our stress levels. This chapter explores these ideas.

Modalities refer to both (1) intelligences and (2) how people process information. *Regarding intelligences*, if you have a limited amount of musical ability and learn to play a musical instrument, chances are that your stress will increase as you attempt to play complicated musical scores. *Regarding processing information*, if you are a visual learner and you take a class where the instructor only speaks and rarely uses visuals, you will experience stress. Knowing how you are smart *and* your most effective learning style can reduce your stress in your own endeavors and also when working with others.

INTELLIGENCES

People are smart in ways other than those measured by traditional and outmoded Intelligence Quotient (IQ) tests. These tests measure essentially the same characteristics that Alfred Binet devised at the turn of the 20th century to predict which French children would succeed or fail in school: memory, vocabulary, spatial thinking, and the ability to draw analogies.

Howard Gardner in his book, *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences,* lists eight intelligences and indicates that there may be even more. Two fundamental propositions are central to multiple intelligences: (1) *Intelligence is not fixed*; every time something is learned, the brain changes, and we have the ability to develop more intellectual capacity as long as we are healthy. (2) *Intelligence is not unitary*; there are many ways to be smart.

The concept of multiple intelligences has had a profound influence on how to think about our "smarts" because we are all smart in different ways. The mindset is to shift from "how smart we are" to "ways that we are smart."

EIGHT INTELLIGENCES

Following is an introductory explanation of commonly used intelligences:

- *Verbal-linguistic* - These people learn best through verbal presentations, reading, writing, and discussing. This mode is the most commonly shared and crucial competence of the human species. It allows us to comprehend the meaning of words in verbal and written form. It also allows us to follow the rules of grammar and syntax and appreciate the sounds, rhythms, and inflection of words. People are *word smart* when they are good at reading, writing, spelling, speaking, telling stories, and playing with words.

- *Logical-mathematical* - This is the area of math-science. This intelligence allows us to work with objects, assess their qualities, and assign numbered symbols. It allows us to order, align, and sequence in the world around us. People are *logic/number smart* when they are good with numbers, sequencing, synthesizing, evaluating, and solving math problems easily. They often learn best through logic.

- *Visual-spatial* - The prime function of this intelligence is to form images and perceive the world accurately. It is linked to verbal intelligence in that the mind stores and recalls its information in pictures, which may then be verbalized. Imaging is a valuable asset in recall and in problem solving. People are *picture smart* when they have good artistic capabilities, an eye for detail and color, spatial awareness, can manipulate perceptions mentally, and enjoy painting, drawing, and sculpturing. They visualize easily and are good with spatial relationships. They learn best through imagery, films, videos, and visual aids.

- *Musical-rhythmic* – This is one of the earliest intelligences to appear; its core functions deal with rhythm, music, tone, pitch, and patterns. Of all the intelligences, the consciousness or mood-altering effect of music and rhythm on the brain is the greatest. When words are combined with melody and rhythm, as in song, they are easier to recall. Music has the ability to inspire, to excite, to express joy and sorrow; it also has the ability to calm and soothe. People are *music smart* when they have the ability to communicate or gain meaning from music; listen to music frequently; play an instrument or sing; and are sensitive to pitch, timbre, timing, tone, and rhythm. People using their music smarts often think in rhythms, melodies, or lyrics. They like to sing, hum, chant, rap, read, or create music. They learn best through music or lyrics and when music is played.

- *Body-kinesthetic* - The main characteristic of this intelligence is to use the body for expressive purposes. Involving the body in any learning event increases the neural activity of the brain and increases the chances for information to be stored in the muscles of the body. People show they are *body smart* when they unite body and mind for physical performance, have good motor skills, use their bodies to communicate, are good at dancing or athletics, and use the body in skilled ways. They are coordinated; use gestures and body language; and enjoy acting, role-playing, dancing, or athletics. People using their body smarts think in movements, gestures, and body language. They often learn best when there is movement or when the content is presented in a "hands-on" form.

- *Interpersonal* - This intelligence gives us the ability to communicate verbally and nonverbally with other people. It is the capacity to perceive emotions, moods, motivation, and intentions. It also allows us to empathize with another person. People are *people smart* when they make and maintain friends easily; are sensitive to the feelings, moods, and motives of others; are good mediators, leaders, and organizers; put themselves in the role of the other; and see things from the other's perspective.

- *Intrapersonal* - This intelligence involves knowledge of the internal aspects of oneself, such as feelings and emotional responses. Self-image and personal identity are part of intrapersonal intelligence. It also gives us our capacity to see wholeness and unity, to discern patterns as they relate to self, and see connection with large orders of things or higher states of consciousness. People are *self-smart* when they have access to their own feelings, strengths, ideas, values, and beliefs; set and meet goals; and enjoy private time to think and reflect. They know themselves well and have the ability to use that information when making decisions.

- *Naturalist* - This intelligence describes the ability to recognize flora and fauna and classify like objects. People are *nature smart* when they have keen observation skills, an ability to make distinctions, and to form classes among natural objects. They have an awareness of the natural world and phenomena, and discriminate among animals, insects, birds, rocks, plants, trees, flowers, stars, planets, or even some non-natural items like cars, airplanes, shoes, or hairstyles.

When the concept of multiple intelligences was first introduced, schools around the country attempted to incorporate the concepts into every lesson. This approach is not practical. The model is an attempt to replace the outdated "Intelligent Quotient" with a more accurate framework of intelligence(s). For example, someone may have very successful social skills (*Interpersonal)* but not be smart in understanding oneself (*Intrapersonal).*

None of the intelligences work in isolation. For example, consider the combination of *Verbal-linguistic* with *Musical-rhythmic.* Think of how you learned the alphabet. Do you hear the melody, "Twinkle, twinkle little star, how I wonder where you are" when "A. B, C, D, E, F, G" is recited? The combination of *Verbal-linguistic* with *Musical-rhythmic* is a reason that people learn the words to melodies more easily than trying to learn words in isolation. When young people "rap," the same two modalities are in play. This understanding can be used for writing, where music is a strong modality and verbal-linguistic is weak.

We need to be aware that people are smart in different ways, that some people learn differently and at various speeds, and that two or more modalities can be used to enhance learning. For example, when learning a speech you can visualize a tree with different branches containing certain points

(visual), you can think of them in order of importance (logical), and you can gestures at key points (*kinesthetic*).

People have all of these intelligences in various degrees. Knowing which intelligences are your strongest can help reduce your stress.

PROCESSING INFORMATION

People process information in different ways. Some people learn better through visual approaches, others through auditory approaches, and others by kinesthetic and tactile techniques. Still others, especially in the culinary arts, use olfactory, and gustatory approaches. *Whereas the intelligences tell us how people are smart, learning modalities explain how people learn.*

Information comes to us through our senses of sight-*visual*, hearing-*auditory*, touching-*tactual or tactile,* taste-*gustatory,* and smell-*olfactory*. Home economics, science, and some fine arts activities employ the senses of taste and smell. But the visual, auditory, and tactual senses are used in the preponderance of teaching. In practice, the tactual sense is expanded to imply any body movement (kinesthetic). Although print is usually considered visual (for the blind it is tactile), interpreting print requires other skills.

The brain learns in many ways at once. As we grow and engage in various activities, some senses develop more than others, but none grow in isolation. The concept can be likened to use of the right and left hand. Although we use both, we prefer one to the other. Similarly, we do not have a single, dominant lifelong learning mode. We learn our first language through sound, but many adults find it easier to learn vocabulary of a second language by seeing words visually, as objects or in print.

Visually oriented people prefer seeing instructions. They form mental pictures, scenes, and even words by projecting them with the mind's eye. Auditory people prefer an oral briefing. They recall things that have been said, music, and other sounds. Kinesthetically oriented people like to get physically involved and get their hands on the activity and often are the first to try things.

Visual and verbal cues can help tap into various modalities. The following lists offer some suggestions:

Visual learners
- Like to see things in writing
- Picture in their minds

Organize by pictures
Like colors
Like to take notes
Want to be shown how to do something rather than be told
Enjoy looking at a drawing/diagram rather than hearing an explanation

The following examples of *verbal connectors* indicate a visual style:
"You can see the situation."
"See what I mean?"
"It appears that.... "
"In your mind's eye...."
"Show me what you mean."
"Do you get the picture?"
"Is it becoming clear?"
"This looks good."
"Here's a bird's eye view."

Auditory learners
Need to hear themselves talk
Learn by repeating
Study out loud
Often request to have directions repeated
Like oral directions
Like the sound of their own voice
Remember directions better if they repeat them out loud

The following examples of *aural connectors* indicate an auditory style:
"I hear what you are saying."
"Does that sound reasonable?"
"That rings true."
"I hear you loud and clear."
"Does it sound right?"
"We're on the same wavelength."
"I remember it word for word."
"That rings a bell with me."
"I'm trying to hear you but you're going too fast."

We often assume auditory learners can learn just by listening. It is important to note that auditory learners need to *hear themselves* because they learn by verbal repeating. In addition, an aural learner who is not cued beforehand in a learning situation may listen and then turn to a neighbor and say, "What did he say?" Before giving an assignment, the instructor should cue students ahead of time by simply saying, "In a moment I'm going to give an assignment." Also, after giving the assignment, the instructor should have learners turn to a learning buddy and repeat what was said.

Kinesthetic/tactile learners
Like to manipulate
Tend to be leg and arm movers
Create energy to stay focused even though their movement itself does not teach anything

The following examples of *kinesthetic/tactile connectors* indicate a kinesthetic/tactile style:

"I've got a handle on that."
"This helps me grasp the issue."
"Get a grip on this point."
"Can you put your finger on it?"
"Does it touch you?"

A person's modality can often be ascertained by observation. Visual people usually follow the person talking with their eyes. Aural people repeat out loud and want things repeated. Kinesthetic people like to move.

We should recognize our own styles to reduce our stress. In a situation, for example, where a supervisor whose learning modality is highly visual will have a natural tendency to use that modality—often to the exclusion of other modalities. If this occurs to you in an instructional situation, exert initiative by asking for a different way or approach to explain what is being taught.
This chapter concludes with a statement from William Glasser who had a giant influence in education: *"If telling were the same as teaching, we would be such good teachers that we could hardly stand it."*

KEY POINTS

- People are smart in different ways and people learn in different ways.

- Knowing the areas in which you are smart and understanding the ways in which you learn can assist in reducing your stress.

Part III

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Developing procedures is crucial for reducing stress. Also, being mindful of impulses—to act reflectively, rather than reflexively—is one of the most important practices for stress reduction. In addition, learning how you are smart and how you learn can also reduce frustration and stress.

SUMMARY

Creating procedures will help you reduces stress, but each new procedure needs to be implemented until it finally becomes an automatic habit. When you run into a challenge, such as, "Where did I put my shopping list?" ask yourself, "What procedure can I create so I don't have to again repeat this experience?"

We all have experiences that prompt feelings leading to stress, but these feelings need not control us. Practicing an impulse control procedure gives us a tool to stay in control and reduce or eliminate stress.

Our stress levels increase when we try to do something that we are not capable of doing. Stress is also increased when we attempt to learn something but are not successful. When we become aware of how we are smart and our best way to learn, our frustrations are reduced along with our stress levels.

CONCLUSION

If something bothers you, create a procedure to deal and control it. Creating and implementing procedures is a critical practice for reducing stress.

You cannot stop an emotion directly. You can only change your mood or your feelings by changing your thoughts or your actions. Redirect your thinking or your actions, and a different feeling will automatically follow.

Engaging in activities in which you are "naturally smart" and learning to use your natural modalities reduces frustration and stress. This does not

mean that you should not try something new; it merely means to have patience with yourself when you do.

Part IV

AWARENESS AND STRESS

Metacognition and Mindsets

Language

Visualization

Part IV
Introduction

AWARENESS AND STRESS

The language we choose to use and our mindsets create our reality.
—Marvin Marshall

Metacognition is about being aware of our thinking and has a direct relationship to mindsets. Mindsets are perceptions, attitudes, dispositions, intentions, and inclinations that emanate from our experiences and through which we filter our thoughts. Our thoughts influence the language we use, which in turn directs our mental images.

When we "hear" ourselves thinking, we are metacogitating. Being aware of our thoughts is a primary step to control stress. The more we are aware of metacognition—our thinking about how we think—the more we enjoy its benefits and the less stress we experience. Also, mindsets direct our reality. To reduce stress, it is critical to understand that often it is not the event itself but our *mindset or perception* of the event that prompts our reactions. These are explained in Chapter 10, *Metacognition and Mindsets.*

The words we choose shape our thinking and feelings, as explained in Chapter 11, *Language*. When we say, "He is making me so happy," we perpetuate the concept that the other person is *causing* the happiness when, in reality, the other person prompted or stimulated the happiness but did not *cause* or *make* us happy.

Visualization is an effective technique for success in any activity. Although the brain is not a muscle, the brain can clearly become more effective. When used purposefully and exercised regularly, it grows more vigorous—and when not—it becomes sluggish and can easily engender stress. Chapter 12, *Visualization*, explains the significance of this procedure to reduce stress.

10
Metacognition and Mindsets

There is no such thing as an immaculate perception.
What you see depends upon what you thought before you looked.
—Myron Tribus

Cognition is about thinking. *Metacognition* is about thinking about thinking—*being aware of our own thought processes.* When we "hear" ourselves thinking, we are metacogitating. Being aware of our thoughts is a primary step in controlling stress.

METACOGNITION

Here is an easy way to understand metacognition.

Reflect on whether or not you hear yourself talking to yourself while solving this problem: *How much is half of two plus two?*

If you heard yourself thinking, you were metacogitating.

If someone asks you, "Tell me how you solved the problem," and you say, "I don't know; I just did it," this indicates a lack of metacognitive awareness.

Not taking control of our own cognitive processes is a contributor to poor decision-making, frustration, and needless stress. Do you continue doing the same things over and over hoping to get different results, or are you doing things differently depending upon the task?

Understanding how the brain works enables us to be in greater control of our thinking and resulting behavior. The process of reflecting on our own thinking allows us to monitor and manage ourselves more effectively. This awareness prompts feedback, which aids efficiency and self-regulation.

Knowing what works for us and what is hard for us can be of assistance when faced with a challenge. It will allow us to become mindful or conscious of *why* we are doing what we are doing. So before even starting, ask some questions. Examples are, "Why am I doing this?" "Do I know how to

do it?" "What do I want it to look like once I am done?" "What should I do first?" "How much time do I need to do it?"

Strategies to increase thinking power are important. We too often emphasize "correct" answers and single solutions. But in so many situations, it is not how many answers we know, but rather *how we proceed when we don't know*—as when confronted with problems, dilemmas, enigmas, and situations to be addressed, the answers to which are not immediately known or readily available.

When faced with a task, most of us just start doing what seems to be the proper thing, giving thought to what we do only if it becomes necessary. For example, when driving an automobile, we stop at a red light "automatically" because we have habituated the process. If we encounter a flashing red light, a situation that is not quite so common, then we start thinking. In life, the difference between those who succeed in doing the more complex tasks of cognition and those who do not is that successful people have learned to be conscious of what they are doing. They do not act impulsively or intuitively when it is inappropriate to do so.

When a routine has been developed, thinking is reduced. The reason is that the brain seeks novelty—something that is different from the "usual." This is the moment when thinking comes into play. This oscillation between a routine way of dealing with a problem and the development of a new approach increases decision-making skills and can reduce stress because the creative spirit comes into play.

Thinking more reflectively is one of our joys. The more we are aware of metacognition—our thinking about how we think—the more we enjoy its benefits and the less stress we experience.

MINDSETS

The conversations we have with ourselves form our perceptions. In fact, a good case can be made that our self-talk creates our reality and our levels of stress. Stress is related to perceiving the world as manageable or unmanageable, and this is directly related to our mindsets.

Mindsets are perceptions, attitudes, dispositions, intentions, and inclinations that emanate from our experiences and filter our thoughts that form the lenses through which we see the world and our lives.

Perceptions are as important as reality. In fact, perceptions *can be* our reality. To reduce stress it is critical to understand that so often it is not the

event but the *perception* of the event that prompts our reactions. This is the reason that three people can see the same event from the same angle but observe and report it differently.

We see life through the filters we have created from our experiences. The information we process is largely determined by our mindsets. We can describe a glass of water as half full or half empty (unless you are an engineer, in which case you might describe the glass as not large enough). We can perceive a situation as a problem or as a challenge; our choice depends upon our mindset.

James Sutton is a psychologist who emphasizes that perceptions are as important as reality. For example, if a person is afraid, the person's behaviors will reflect that fear—regardless of whether there is anything to be afraid of or not. Jim's experiences have led him to conclude that there are people who are damaged more by their *perceptions* than by the actual realities of their lives.

Roger, a 12-year-old, was a perfect example. He had undergone the successful removal of a brain tumor (benign, fortunately). Following the surgery, Roger began to fall apart in his academic studies at school and in his social relationships. That was when Dr. James Sutton was consulted. As best as he could determine from hospital and surgical records, there was no medical reason why this boy should have trouble after the surgery. In fact, it was expected that he would improve. Here is how Jim related the experience of working with the young boy to me.

> "Roger, do you think that when the surgeon removed the tumor he also took out part of your brain?"
>
> "No, sir," the boy replied softly. "I thought he took all of it."
>
> Good grief! No wonder this boy was having trouble. He thought he had to function with no brain at all! Jim explained the surgery to Roger and assured him that he still had *all* of his brain and the ability to use it.
>
> "Really?" Roger asked with an obvious sense of relief in his voice. His young face broke into the first smile Jim had seen from him.

"Absolutely!"

Over the next few days and weeks Roger improved, and he kept on improving in both his academic and social relationships.

Your mindset helps you handle stress—or be overcome by it.

KEY POINTS

- Metacognition is thinking about thinking.
- Mindsets emanate from our experiences and filter our thoughts.
- Mindsets drive our perceptions and our behaviors.
- Being aware of our thoughts and mindsets is a critical step in controlling stress.

11
Language

I can live two months on a good compliment.
—Mark Twain

We all have had the experience of reading a story where we were emotionally moved. Sometimes we cried; sometimes we felt joy. Sometimes we were left sad when the story concluded. Reflect on this for a moment. A writer took a blank slate and through words alone created a story so real that the words—only words—prompted our emotions.

LANGUAGE

Language shapes our thoughts. In his classic book, "*1984*," George Orwell demonstrated the power of words with the example of the term "freedom." If there were no such word, how could the concept be envisioned and communicated? Orwell wrote about clarity of words and symbols and made the point that words create visions and actuate behavior. Your choice of words empowers or restricts and, therefore, influences your stress levels.

The power of words may seem obvious but the fact is that most of us, most of the time, are not mindful of the effect of our words. We often choose our clothes more carefully then we choose our words. What we say—both to ourselves and to others—is critically related to the reduction of stress.

TEST YOURSELF

Here is an exercise to help you determine how much control you have over the language you use. For the next 24 hours, resist saying any *unkind words* about or to anybody—*including yourself.*

If you believe that you can do this, then a wonderful opportunity awaits you for improving relationships and for reducing future stress. However, if you believe the exercise is too difficult, think of this activity with the follow-

ing examples in mind. If I ask you to go for 24 hours without drinking any alcohol of any kind, and you retort that you could not, I would classify you as an alcoholic. If you are a heavy coffee drinker, and I ask you to go for 24 hours without drinking any coffee and you respond that it is impossible, I would assume that you are addicted to caffeine and have lost control of your body. If you cannot go for 24 hours without speaking unkind words about others or yourself, then you have lost control of your tongue.

When you truly come to understand the power of words, you will handle them carefully—as carefully as you would a loaded gun.

The purpose of the childhood expression, "Sticks and stones can break our bones but words will never hurt us," was to make us feel better, but down deep we *knew* that words could hurt. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow stated the situation with penetrating insight: *A torn jacket is soon mended, but hard words bruise the heart of a child.*

THE POWER OF WORDS

Your words have the power to make a situation positive or negative. For example, if you start a phrase with the word "unfortunately," you immediately create a negative mindset in the person receiving the message. The word conjures up that something bad or unpleasant is about to follow, and whatever you say after "unfortunately" will be viewed negatively. The same holds true with the word "but" because it has a tendency to negate whatever came before it. For example a parent says to the teenager, "Yes, you can go with your friends but you need to be back by nine o'clock." Substituting the word "and" for "but" eliminates the negative connotation: "Sure you can go with your friends and be back by nine o'clock." Notice that this one word creates an entirely different feeling. Your language helps mold your thoughts, so be aware of any words that have a negating effect. Examples are: although, however, still, yet, and nevertheless.

Choosing—either consciously or nonconsciously—to use negative language can have long-lasting repercussions. One or two mean-spirited words are not easily forgotten. Ill words about other people can have horrible results. An extreme example is in Shakespeare's play, "*Othello,"* where Iago's evil is perpetuated almost exclusively through words. At the play's beginning, Iago vows to destroy the Moorish general, Othello, for bypassing him for promotion. Knowing Othello's jealous nature, Iago convinces him that his new wife, Desdemona, is having an affair with another man. The charge

seems preposterous, but Iago repeats the accusation again and again, and arranges the circumstantial evidence necessary to destroy Desdemona's credibility. Othello comes to believe Iago, and in the end, Othello murders his beloved, only to learn almost immediately that Iago's words were false. For Othello, truth was seen too late; the deed could never be undone.

Negative words about others can never be erased. If you have humiliated another person, of course you should apologize to him or her. But the far more moral thing to do is to exercise restraint *before* you inflict damage, for the greatest remorse can never erase your words.

Here is a word to keep in mind when you feel discouraged. (Notice how it changes your thoughts and feelings.) As a salesperson, you realize that you will not meet your sales quota. Rephrase, "What if I can't meet my quota?" to "So what if I can't meet the quota!" Just inserting the word "so" can change your disposition.

If you think your comments about others are rarely malicious, ask yourself if you would be willing to make the same comments directly *to* the person. If the answer is, "*No,*" then ask yourself whether you should communicate the idea at all. Key questions to ponder before saying anything ill of others: *Is it true? Is it fair? Is it necessary?*

Here is another suggestion: Develop a way of talking about others that is kind and fair—even when the sentiment is not complimentary. Consider the way you would want others to say things about you. This will help you determine the best words to use.

See if you can visualize the power of words in the following scenario:

> You are five years old. It's a beautiful spring day and the training wheels of your bike have just been removed. Your parent steadies the bike just a bit as you start to pedal away, and then, although your parent is still running beside you, you are on your own! The wind is in your face and a huge smile develops; you are happy but still nervous. Something inside seems to remind you that disaster might strike at any moment. But then you hear these magical words of encouragement: "Keep going! You're doing it!" Your confidence soars as you hear, "Don't worry, I'm here if you need me," and all negative thoughts melt away.

I once came across the autobiographical reminiscence of a great pianist who remembered, when as a child, he was going up the stairs and overheard his piano teacher tell his mother, "The boy has golden hands." From that day on, the pianist recalled, he regarded his own hands with awe. No matter how difficult a challenge he confronted at the keyboard, he was undaunted; after all, he had "golden hands."

Reflect on the following story that originated during World War II. A young lieutenant explained the new GI insurance program to thousands of troops who were to be sent overseas. After a lengthy presentation, the young lieutenant asked for a showing of hands of those who were interested. No hands were raised.

The lieutenant was dejected until an old sergeant raised his hand and asked permission to say a few words to the troops. The lieutenant nodded affirmatively.

The sergeant took the microphone and announced that within the week, they all would be sent overseas. Some of them would be sent to the front lines, and, unfortunately, some of them would not be coming back.

He went on to say, "As the lieutenant has already explained, for those of you who enroll in this new GI insurance plan and who are killed, the U. S. Government will be obligated to send your families a check for $10,000. But for those who do not enroll in this new GI insurance and are killed, the U.S. Government will not be obligated to send your families one single dime."

The old sergeant paused and then inquired, "Do you believe the U.S. Government will be sending to the front lines those of you who are enrolled in the new GI plan—or those who are not enrolled?

BE KIND

As a youth, I developed an attitude that I still use to this day: *Be kind to myself.* I learned at an early age that I was not perfect, that I made mistakes, and that sometimes I was sorry for what I did or said. Realizing that I could not undo the past and rather than punishing myself with negative thoughts and feelings, I decided to embrace the attitude of the great baseball player, Satchel Page, who said: *"Don't look back; something may be gaining on you."*

Mentally punishing oneself would do no good—but rather enormous harm. I learned that I have less stress and am more productive when I am

kind, not only to myself, but also to others. This is the case especially in my relationship with my wife, where I continually ask myself, *"Will these words be kind to her?"*

People who use the power of language to their benefit live with less stress. Rather than stew over what cannot be changed, they look to what *can* be changed. The novel and motion picture, "*Love Story,"* is best known for the famous line: "Love means never having to say you are sorry." Nothing could be further from the truth! Love means frequently having to say that you are sorry.

Being gentle with yourself and with people who are important to you can significantly reduce your stress. Just reflect, "Am I being kind?"

KEY POINTS

- The language we choose shapes our thinking and feelings.
- The words we choose can turn a negative to a positive.
- What people hear can have a significant impact on them.
- The words you use can either reduce or increase stress.

12
Visualization

Visuals prompt thinking that can reduce stress.
—Marvin Marshall

Visualization—creating mental images—can improve the quality of life. Those who use visualization are catapulted to a more positive energy level because it increases the sense of emotional well-being.

Before the first airplane was built, there were many people who visualized human flight. Before smart phones were developed, Internet communication with a hand-held device had to be visualized. There is no doubt that visualization is a critical cornerstone for any goal to be achieved.

A BASIC UNDERSTANDING

Until just over 100 years ago, no person could ever tell another person the same story. Visualize the following short scenario to understand the process:

A cowboy is riding a horse. The horse sees a snake.
The horse jumps and the rider is thrown off the horse.

Mentally respond to the following questions:
What was the rider wearing?
Where did this incident occur?
What was the color of the horse?
What time did this event take place?

Your imagination visualized the scene. You certainly could not describe what you envisioned from reading the short description because there were no descriptors—no adjectives or adverbs. So what's the point? Before motion pictures, no one could see the exact same story, the same visuals.

Authors, in contrast to motion pictures screenwriters, write for the mind. Novels in particular are elaborate scenarios in which each of us creates a moving picture for oneself.

The critical point to understand is that the human brain thinks in pictures—not in words. Therefore, tap into the ability to visualize possibilities and outcomes *that are positive*. The energy of upward movement counteracts stress and greatly improves effectiveness.

MISSING TILE SYNDROME

Imagine sitting in a room and looking up at a tiled ceiling. You notice that one tile is missing. On what would you concentrate your vision? The answer, of course, is on the missing tile.

The tile can be replaced to make a perfect ceiling. But this doesn't apply to life. Unlike a ceiling, life can never be made perfect. For that reason, concentrating on the "missing tiles in life" can be counterproductive and prompts unnecessary stress.

Dennis Prager is the author of a number of significant books, including *Happiness is a Serious Business*. Below is his story about this topic, shared with permission from the author.

> Let me give you the example that taught me this great lesson about what I call *The Missing Tile Syndrome*. A bald man once said to me, "You know, Dennis, whenever I walk into a room with people, all I see is hair."
>
> When I heard this, I immediately realized this man sees the world completely differently from how I do. Because I have all my hair, when I walk into a room I don't even notice hair. It's not a missing tile for me. But for this person, hair is what he sees.
>
> This applies, in some way, to everyone. When a woman who thinks she has imperfect legs walks into a room, all she sees are perfect legs. Or take the example of the woman who once said to me, "Wherever I go, all I see are pregnant women." Now how could that be? The vast majority of women, even those young enough to be pregnant, are not

pregnant at any given time. But that was all she saw because she wanted to become pregnant and wasn't able. Her missing tile was not having a child. That's the way human nature is. We focus on what's missing in our lives.

The Missing Tile Syndrome is a very big obstacle to happiness—so big that it makes happiness almost impossible. There will always be something missing in your life. When you see other people's kids, you'll think you see tiles that are missing in your own children. "Gee, why can't my kids study as hard, or be as polite, or be as bright, or be as good looking, or be as athletic?" The same holds true regarding our spouses, our work, or our looks. The list is endless.

I'll give one more example. When I was single and looking to find the "right woman," I wanted to first identify the most important trait to look for in my future wife. So after almost every date I would call my best friend, Joseph, and announce, "Joseph, tonight I identified the most important trait in a woman." And he would always say, "Okay, Dennis, what is it?" and then patiently listen. One night I would tell him that it was intelligence; another night that it was looks; another night, personality; and yet on another night, kindness. One night, as usual, I called him up after an evening out and said, "Joseph, I finally figured out what the most important trait in a woman is." But this time he didn't say, "Okay, Dennis, what is it?" Instead he said, "Don't tell me, I'll tell you!" Perplexed I asked, "How do you know? You don't even know the woman I went out with." "It doesn't matter," he said, "Whatever trait tonight's woman was missing, that's the one you decided is the most important trait in a woman." I could say nothing. He was right. Whatever that night's date was missing was what I would declare the most important trait in a woman that I wanted to marry.

I hadn't yet come up with the term *Missing Tile Syndrome, but* that is exactly what I was suffering from. That's the way we play tricks on ourselves and undermine our happiness—

> by concentrating on the missing tiles. So we really have a simple choice: Do we focus on the rest of the ceiling, on all the tiles we do have, or do we focus on the ones we're missing? To a large extent, the answer to that question will determine how happy you will be.

Is there a relationship between happiness and stress?

AN EXAMPLE TO REMEMBER

What the brain actually witnesses and what the brain imagines stimulate exactly the same areas of the brain.

A visualization-stimulation increases the probability of success because it is priming the neural circuits that will be used in the actual activity. This is the reason that visualization is such an effective technique for success in any activity.

James Nesmeth was an average golfer who shot in the 90's. For seven years, however, he completely left the game; he did not touch a golf club nor set foot on a fairway. Major Nesmeth spent those seven years imprisoned in a small cell as a prisoner of war in North Vietnam. During almost the entire time he was imprisoned, he was isolated. He believed that he could keep himself sane in his tiny cell under hideous conditions by occupying his mind.

He decided to practice his golf game. He was in no hurry. He had no place to go. He imagined that he was at his favorite golf course playing a full round of golf. Every day he experienced each detail. He saw himself dressed in his golf clothes. He smelled the fragrance of the trees and the freshly trimmed grass. In his mind's eye, he experienced different weather conditions—windy spring days, overcast winter days, and sunny summer mornings. He visualized every single step, from how he positioned himself before each swing to the follow-through afterwards. Starting at the first tee, he looked down and saw the little ball. He visualized addressing it, the feel of the grip of the club, and the position of his stance. He instructed himself as he practiced smoothing out his downswing and the follow-through on his shot. Then he watched the ball arc down the exact center of the fairway, bounce a couple of times and roll to the precise spot he had selected. Not once did he ever miss a shot, never took a hook or a slice, never missed a putt. Day after day he played a full 18 holes of golf.

When the Major Nesmeth was liberated, one of the first things he did was go to the golf course and play a round of golf. The first time out, and without having touched a golf club in seven years, he shot a 74—knocking 20 strokes off his previous best round of golf. That is the great power of visualization!

Although the brain is not a muscle, it is clearly subject to some of the same principles as other approaches of learning to become more effective. When used purposefully and exercised regularly, it grows more vigorous—and when not, it becomes sluggish and can easily engender stress.

Conjuring up vivid images (engaging the right hemisphere of the brain) while reading a book (engaging the left hemisphere of the brain) encourages hemispheric integration that leads to improved memory and more efficient learning. When you engage both sides of the brain, you can keep on making connections, continuing to grow throughout your life. *Learning builds learning.* As you continue to learn and grow, the neural networks of the brain augment, creating more connections.

Visualization should become a regular strategy. Research studies continue to attest to how the power of visualization aids memory, procedures, and motor learning. Take every opportunity to create images for the written word. When we use this strategy, both for ourselves and with others, we create meaning and empowerment. One way to do this is to convey information in story form.

Stories are retained longer than facts because they create visual images. Images touch emotions because they arouse sensations that are remembered longer than facts. When the history teacher was asked the secret for making the subject so interesting and students so enthused, the response was, *"I can tell you in two words: Tell stories."*

An old storyteller's tale makes the point:

> TRUTH walked around naked, and everyone shunned him.
>
> STORY walked around in colored clothes, and everyone liked him.
>
> TRUTH inquired of STORY, "What is it you do that has people like you?"

STORY lent TRUTH some colorful garb and interesting clothing.

Everyone began liking TRUTH.

Stories automatically create visualizations, as with the opening example of the rider on a horse. Because visualizations empower, they can do wonders to reduce stress. Employing this practice is quite simple. Just start with the words, "Imagine yourself. . . . "The next time you feel under stress, create a story—a visualization—of how you would like the situation to be and then witness how your stress dissipates.

KEY POINTS

- The brain thinks in pictures—not in words.
- Creating mental images of what you want empowers and reduces stress.
- Rather than focusing on the "missing tile," focus on all the rest of the tiles in the ceiling.
- The more vivid the picture, the more it will be remembered.
- Creating images empowers and, therefore, reduces stress.

Part IV

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Being mindful of your thoughts is critical for reducing stress. Similarly, being aware of the words you choose has a powerful positive or negative effect on reducing stress. In addition, the visions you create have a significant impact on your stress levels.

SUMMARY

Cognition is about thinking. *Metacognition* is about "thinking about thinking"—being aware of your own thought processes. When you "hear" yourself thinking, you are metacogitating. Being aware of your thoughts is a primary step in controlling stress. *Mindsets* are perceptions, attitudes, dispositions, and inclinations that emanate from your experiences and filter your thoughts. Understanding that you have these filters allows you to be more objective. When you understand why you do what you do, you gain more control over yourself and can act to reduce your stress.

The power of words may seem obvious but the fact is that most of us, most of the time, are *not* mindful of the effect of our words. What we say—both to ourselves and to others—has a critical impact on our stress levels.

Creating mental images can improve the quality of life—if for no other reason than images redirect thinking and the resultant emotions. Using imaging catapults us to a more positive energy level because it increases the sense of emotional well-being, which reduces levels of stress.

CONCLUSION

Focus on your self-talk—what you say to yourself, especially *about yourself.* If your self-talk is not kind, change it. Choose words that empower, rather than ones that disempower. Finally, whenever you feel stress, create a vision of how you would like the situation to be.

Part V

THE BODY AND STRESS

Switchtasking

Breathing, Posture, and Exercise

Sleep, Nutrition, and Laughter

Part V
Introduction

THE BODY AND STRESS

Learning the difference between switchtasking, multitasking, and singletasking can reduces stress.
—Marvin Marshall

The term "multitasking" is often misunderstood. Learning the difference between multitasking, switchtasking, and singletasking leads to more efficiency and reduced stress. How a person breathes can be a significant factor in controlling stress. The same holds true for adequate sleep, nutrition, and laughter.

Switchtasking is engaging in two activities when both activities are competing for the same neural connections. *Multitasking* is also engaging in two activities at the same time, but the tasks are *no*t competing for the same neural connections. *Singletasking* is engagement where the brain is focused exclusively on one activity. All three types are explained in Chapter 13, *Switchtasking.* Which one you choose when engaged in an activity influences your stress.

Breathing is ordinarily an involuntary act, but it is the only function through which you can influence the involuntary nervous system. Your physical posture can improve your effectiveness while also reducing your stress. Exercise plays a key role in reducing and preventing the effects of stress and other health ailments. Chapter 14, *Breathing, Posture, and Exercise*, discusses some interesting insights on breathing, posture, and exercise that can have a direct effect on reducing stress.

Studies show that when people do not get enough sleep, they have a tendency to eat unhealthy foods along with a tendency to gain weight. As we grow older, our metabolism decreases and so eating the same amounts of food creates increased body weight. Laughter triggers the release of endorphins, the body's natural feel-good chemicals, and promotes a sense of well-

being that reduces the negative effects of stress. You will discover some engaging observations in Chapter 15, *Sleep, Nutrition, and Laughter*.

13
Switchtasking

"A man who chases two rabbits catches neither."
–Confucius

Life has become so stressful that the "simplify your life" approach is growing in popularity. By resisting the temptation to switchtask or multitask, you will have made a step in this direction—a step that will reduce your stress.

SWITCHTASKING

With so much to do, too little time, and growing piles of daily demands, attempting two activities at the same time is undeniably enticing. However, when trying to accomplish two activities at the same time where both require focused attention, both activities suffer significantly. Unfortunately, the hard fact is that the attempt to do two activities involving the same neurons in the brain is really *switchtasking* and correlates with low productivity and cognitive impairment. The practice weakens ability to concentrate. In so many situations, the brain simply cannot deal with more than one task at a time.

Switchtasking releases cortisol, the "stress hormone" that diminishes the ability to process information. Stress associated with trying to switchtask shrinks brain neurons and reduces problem-solving ability. The activity also decreases emotional regulation, resilience, and impulse control. We cannot switchtask very well, and when we say we can, we are deluding ourselves. The brain is very good at deluding itself. For example, we assume that the brain can watch television and read at the same time without diminishing cognition and effectiveness in both activities.

MULTITASKING

Real multitasking is possible and can be effective when two activities are not competing for the same brain resources. For example, we can talk and drive simultaneously, we can eat and watch television at the same time, and we can listen and garden simultaneously. Even though concentration is diminished in each activity, it may be worth engaging in both activities simultaneously because focus is not critical.

Suppose, for example, that you have a project with a deadline soon approaching. As you are working, your phone rings. A natural impulse is to answer the phone. Rather than answering the phone while continuing to work on your report, you decide to let the answering device record the message. You can listen to the phone message and decide if returning the call is urgent or if it can wait. By not engaging in two activities that may require concentration, you will have avoided an activity that could have increased your stress regarding meeting your project deadline.

My wife is a novelist. She finds that if she tries to create a scenario while listening to music on the radio, her efficiency is diminished. If you engage in smartphone activities while at a restaurant, you will be missing the ambience and other pleasures of dining out. If your child—or any other loved one—is trying to communicate with you while you are watching television, you will not be able to pay full attention to both. You will have missed an opportunity to strengthen an important relationship in your life and you will have also missed the full information of the television program.

SINGLETASKING

Singletasking requires making a commitment to address only one task at a time to the exclusion of other demands or ideas in the moment. It means sequential handling—moving to the next task after working on the current task. This does not necessarily require completion of the current task; it just means not engaging in *another* focus-required activity at the same time.

Singletasking does not require us to discard thoughts that are not aligned with the current endeavor. Pausing to write down an ancillary thought does not lessen our commitment to singletasking. We are simply adopting a procedure that empowers us to place unrelated insights aside until the time comes to redirect our mind.

When a thought arises that is ancillary to what you are doing, simply jot down the idea on a notepad, and park it on your task. When using this procedure, any idea that is not directly related to the task can be retrieved later. The act of "parking" extraneous ideas for a more appropriate time not only assists in the completion of the task at hand but also assists efficiency, which has a connection to reducing stress.

Also, consider "cluster tasking" or grouping tasks that you perform sporadically several times during the day—such as returning phone calls or responding to messages. Think of doing them in clusters a few designated times a day *rather than when the urge arises*. Decide how long to spend on cluster tasking, perhaps using a timer as a reminder of when to start and stop, and avoid engaging in tasks outside the cluster.

Finally, people who are mindful of singletasking are more successful in relationships. These are people who have developed the approach that, when talking to you, they look directly at you. As a result, you feel that there is nothing the other person is interested in at that time—except talking to you. An opposite feeling is promoted when, in conversation, the other person's eyes are darting around. This type of communication is an example of switchtasking, which can promote frustration and stress.

SUMMARY

Switchtasking is engaging in two activities *where both activities are competing for the same neural connections.* Examples are listening to a conversation while reading a text message on a smart phone or reading a report while watching television. When the brain switches from one activity to another, effectiveness is significantly diminished.

Multitasking is also engaging in two activities at the same time—but the tasks are *no*t competing for the same neural connections. Eating and watching television simultaneously diminishes focus on each activity but not to the extent that one impinges on the other.

Singletasking is engagement where the brain is focused exclusively on one activity. Just being aware when you are singletasking, or multitasking, or switchtasking can reduce your stress. Mindfulness puts you in control. Being in control always reduces stress.

KEY POINTS

- Switchtasking occurs when two or more activities requiring the same neural pathways in the brain compete with each other.
- Switchtasking diminishes efficiency in both.
- Multitasking occurs when two activities are not competing for the same brain resources.
- Singletasking occurs when addressing only one task at a time.
- Singletasking can improve relationships and reduce stress.
- Being mindful of when you are engaging in switchtasking, multitasking, or singletasking can reduce stress.

14
Breathing, Posture, and Exercise

Reduce the stress levels in your life through relaxation techniques like meditation, deep breathing, and exercise. You will look and feel way better for it.
—*Suzanne Somers*

Meditation and Hatha Yoga are widely used approaches for reducing stress. However, since I do not practice either of these techniques, I leave these topics to experts in these areas. *Deep breathing*, *physical posture,* and *exercise* are the topics of this chapter.

RESEARCH

Research is mounting that a potent technique for stress relief is deep breathing. The technique is to breathe slowly and deeply because it can have a profound effect on your well-being. Breathing slowly and deeply helps reduce anxiety, controls blood pressure, improves heart rate, makes arteries more flexible, and activates the parasympathetic nervous system that reduces the body's fight-flight-freeze response to danger and stress.

Breathing is ordinarily an involuntary act, but it is the only function through which you can influence the involuntary nervous system. The objective is to make breathing a conscious activity. Once conscious breathing is learned and used, you will be in possession of an extraordinarily powerful technique that

1. Lowers blood pressure,
2. Calms emotions,
3. Helps the body realign itself,
4. Makes cognitive processes more efficient,
6. Manages stress, and
7. Enriches the sound of your voice.

DIFFERNT TYPES OF BREATHING

Breathing can be practiced in different ways. It is common for females to lift their shoulders and chest when taking in oxygen. The vast majority of voice coaches refer to abdominal breathing, diaphragmatic breathing, or belly breathing. I have witnessed demonstrations by voice specialists having trainees lie supine on a floor and place a book on the abdomen to view the book raise and fall as the person inhales and exhales. However, this type of breathing does not fill the lungs which serves as a single unit of elastic material. The diaphragm is shaped like a parachute, umbrella, or jellyfish and lies *across* the body. Its action is involuntary. It rises and falls depending upon the amount of air in the upper part of the body.

I refer to my own slow deep breathing as *"back breathing."* When I breathe deeply, *my back expands*. When I practice this procedure, my respiration rate (inhaling and exhaling) is around four to five (4-5) times per minute, whereas the usual rate for adults is 12 – 15 breaths per minute.

BACK BREATHING

To begin teaching your body conscious "back breathing," visualize your back expanding as you slowly inhale. Exhale slowly. Now, take a slow deep breath a second time, and again exhale slowly. Inhale slowly and deeply a third time while you focus on your back expanding. Take a moment to fully appreciate what your upper body feels like when it is full of air. By the way, this is the type of breathing many opera singers use because it provides the vocal chords with more pressure than any other breathing style.

As you become more familiar with feeling your back fully expanded, notice that any emotion calms down. Once you have become comfortable with the feeling of your body in a "full of air in your back" position, you are ready to use this technique regularly. (As you will read in the next chapter, practicing deep back breathing is the first procedure I use to fall asleep.)

ADDITIONAL PRACTICE

First, without inhaling, elevate your sternum—the breastbone at the center of the chest. This will automatically raise the rib cage and provide a more efficient breathing position.

If you find that lifting your sternum without inhaling is difficult, lift both arms above your head, pointing to the ceiling. Then, careful to hold the chest where the high arms put it, lower your arms. You will find your chest much higher than it was originally, your ribs expanded farther than they were originally, and you will be conscious of your back moving. This high chest, rib expanded, shoulders down in a relaxed position is the one to maintain for back breathing.

Just keeping the sternum up puts you in a more relaxed, alert, in-control physiological position. You will find yourself listening, thinking, and speaking more clearly. You will also receive, store, and retrieve information more efficiently because the body is being used more efficiently. More oxygen is reaching the brain, and your stress is lowered.

Inhale slowly for 4 slow counts. Hold "full" for 4 counts. Slowly exhale for 4 counts. Hold "empty" for 4 counts. Repeat this process for 3 minutes. You have now learned a 3-minute "Stress Buster."

Practice holding your back (lungs) full for longer and longer periods of time. Begin with 5 seconds. Increase to 10 seconds. Continue increasing the amount of time you can stay "full" as long as possible. Listen to a conversation, a radio program, or watch a program while you practice on "full." Whenever your body becomes uncomfortable with the "full" feeling, exhale to "empty" for a moment, and then inhale back to "full."

Your body will not maintain back breathing naturally—nor is it necessary. However, when you are feeling stressed, practicing back breathing will help.

PHYSICAL POSTURE

The following technique may seem unusual, but it has been researched, proven many times, and has garnered thousands of testimonials about its effectiveness at the Harvard Decision Science Laboratory at Harvard University. The technique has to do with how your *body* can improve your effectiveness while also reducing your stress.

Stand akimbo–like the characters of Superman and Superwoman. That is, place your feet part, put your hands on your hips with thumbs pointed to the rear, elbows out, and with your shoulders down and back. Stand in this power position for 60 seconds and your body will influence your brain because this position causes hormonal changes in your body's chemistry. Stand in this power position for one minute before entering what you think may be a stressful situation. When using this technique, you will find that

you have become more confident and in command, both of which reduce stress levels.

Two other techniques to improve your physical posture are the Alexander Technique and Pilates.

ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE

Many actors use the Alexander Technique to empower their presentations. The technique, like back breathing, requires mindfulness—that is, practicing until the technique becomes habitual. The procedure is to lengthen the neck and spine to maintain a healthy body. The Alexander Technique can be summarized:

1. Stand with heels and balls of the feet planted flat on the floor.
2. Lengthen the spine.
3. Widen the shoulders
4. Loosen the hips.
5. Bend the knees slightly.
6. Allow the neck to stretch and refuse to give in.

The power of this technique is that when your body is in its most efficient physical position, you have a sense of being powerful, in control, and able to deal more effectively with stress.

A simple approach for employing this technique is to visualize a string pulling you up from the top of your head. When you posture is in this position, you will be standing in the "Noble Position."

PILATES

The essence of *Pilates* is to develop a strong "core." The core consists of the abdominal muscles and the muscles closest to the spine. Control of the core is achieved by integrating the trunk, pelvis, and shoulder girdle.

Similar to the Alexander Technique, Pilates elongates and strengthens, improving muscle elasticity and joint mobility. Even though instructors of

Pilates and the Alexander Technique are trained and certified, their respective approaches and equipment can differ. [2]

By emphasizing correct spinal and pelvic alignment, and concentrating on smooth, flowing movement, you become acutely in tune with your body. You actually learn how to control body movement. Pilates teaches body awareness, good posture, plus easy and graceful movement. Pilates also improves flexibility, agility and economy of motion. It even helps alleviate back pain, to which I can attest. Working with my Pilates instructor, my posture improved, my walking gait improved, my scoliosis is in check, and I am more physically fit than I was before I took Pilates training.

Pilates conditions the whole body, even the ankles and feet. The training helps one enjoy daily activities with greater ease, better performance, and less chance of injury. When the body is in its proper position, control is enhanced and stress is controlled.

EXERCISE

Staying fit can reduce the production of stress hormones. Exercise can be referred to as the ultimate stress reducer. When I was dismissed from a job, (before being rehired to the same position), I was emotionally jarred, but I felt little if any stress. I attribute this to a positive outlook and exercise.[3]

It cannot be stated strongly enough that physical activity plays a key role in reducing and preventing the effects of stress, but you don't have to be an athlete or spend hours in a gym to experience the benefits. Just about any form of physical activity can help relieve stress and burn away anger, tension, and frustration. Not only does exercise releases endorphins that boost your mood and make you feel good, but it can also serve as a valuable time out from your daily cares.

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[2] My Alexander Technique instructor had me lie supine on an elevated table, a practice Frederick Matthias Alexander, the founder of the procedure, never used. My Pilates instructor had a "reformer" as well as other Pilates' equipment. However, when I trained in Jamaica, the Pilates instructor only used a large exercise ball.

[3] At the time I was running about one mile a day. I never ran long distances and ran on blacktop, never on concrete, which is too jarring to the body. I knew too many people who ran *long* distances for years and "wore out" parts of their bodies so they could no longer run.

Aerobic exercise, in particular, can be one of the most effective approaches for dealing with stress because it can improve your cardiovascular system and decrease your anxiety level. Experts recommend that the aerobic part of your exercise be at least 15 minutes and, depending on your age, be done with at least a day's rest between any two of the same routines to let your body recuperate. For optimal benefits, you should exercise at least three days a week in order to improve not only your health, but also your mental outlook.

I started using a treadmill to reduce the jarring effect of running. Many treadmills are now equipped with systems for analyzing your progress. I now occasionally sprint for a while and then walk for a while. Sprinting and exercising on a treadmill are both excellent aerobic exercises. Bicycle machines are also good aerobic exercises. Brisk walking is the easiest and is always beneficial.

Stretching and strength activities are also necessary for a healthy body. Yoga, weight training, and Tai Chi are excellent exercises in this regard. As with any such activity, ALWAYS start slowly and increase your duration and/or speed in small increments. Give your body time to recover, and start AFTER consulting a medical doctor.

Any increase in aerobic activity will increase the flow of nutritious blood to your brain, which all neuroscientists agree is a good thing. It should also be noted that individuals who are more physically fit experience fewer health troubles. They are also less likely to suffer from psychological problems such as depression, binge eating, insomnia, or other similar type challenges. Without exercise, you are increasing the likelihood that you will be afflicted with colds, flu, or other medical problems.

If you find it difficult to become *motivated* to start exercising, there are a number of steps you can take. You can go to a gym. Knowing that you'll have to pay dues to a gym may make it more likely that you will actually exercise. You could join an exercise class at a community center where you'll meet other people who are in a similar position and where the camaraderie that develops between exercisers can help reduce stress levels. You might consider hiring a personal trainer. A trainer can provide powerful motivation, pushing you to complete exercises you never thought possible. Another approach is to exercise in front of a television set using a DVD, following the instructor's directions as you do the exercises. These programs are available for all age groups.

Exercise will make you feel *less* anxious. Your mood will improve, enabling you to deal more effectively with stress. Exercise can also improve your *self-image*. You will experience greater self-worth and more confidence, which, in turn, will reduce your stress levels. A confident person knows how to handle stress without becoming flustered. As a result of exercise, you may also end up eating more healthfully. Your improved menu may also prove to be a stress reliever.

Once you're in the habit of being physically active, try to incorporate *regular* exercise into your daily schedule. Activities that are continuous and rhythmic—and require moving both your arms and your legs—are especially effective at relieving stress. Choose an activity you enjoy, so you're more likely to stick with it. Instead of continuing to focus on your thoughts while you exercise, make a conscious effort to coordinate your breathing with your movements. Adding this mindfulness to your exercise routine will help you redirect negative thoughts that often accompany stress. Paying attention to how your body feels is also the surest way to avoid picking up an injury. When you've exercised, you'll likely find it easier to put other stress management techniques to use, including reaching out to others and engaging socially.

Incorporating exercise into your life is critical for good health and should be a gradual process. You don't have to run marathons to reap psychological and physical benefits. In addition to allotting specific times for exercising, you should be looking for *additional opportunities to engage in movement*. This could mean walking up stairs instead of taking an elevator and parking where you will be walking further to your destination. Being disciplined is important, and thinking of each exercise as beneficial makes it more tolerable. The point is to get moving at every available opportunity.

Here are some results of additional research on the topic to prompt you to get enough exercise. Exercise improves blood flow to the brain, feeding the growth of new blood vessels and even new brain cells. The growth of new neurons helps protect brain cells from degeneration. Exercise is now referred to as *regenerative medicine* because of its ability for restoring and repairing. Exercise has also been shown to extend life by slowing down the aging of cells. As humans get older, cells divide over and over again, and the telomeres—the protective caps on the end of chromosomes—get shorter. Exercise protects telomeres, slowing the aging process at the cellular level.

A physician answered the query, "What would be the best form of exercises?" with "The best would be the one you are willing to do!" Good advice for anyone who wants to start an exercise program.

SITTING IS THE NEW SMOKING

The human body was developed for movement. A sedentary culture of sitting is taking a major toll on people's health and stress on the body. Sitting for more than six hours a day puts you on a very unhealthy path—even if you exercise regularly. When sitting for long periods of time, our bodies become less efficient. Bottoms become bigger because sitting down puts a large amount of force on the body tissues that make fat cells. People who sit for prolonged periods throughout the day are predisposed to developing diabetes, as well as other health problems. In addition, lack of movement increases a propensity for depression and feeling blue.

Here are a few thoughts to resist the adverse effects of sitting too long.

Before I purchased a standing desk (described below) I had set my computer clock to announce the time every 15 minutes. I would take just a moment to stand and stretch. The stretch that I still engage in most often is standing, arms outstretched at shoulder height, and then breathing slowly three (3) times. This stretch forces my sternum to extend—allowing for more efficient breathing and reversing the collapsing posture of sitting. You will feel your sternum extend out and your body becoming more efficient for proper breathing. This is a simple variation of the Alexander Technique for posture improvement and for eliminating harmful body tension.

Although a treadmill desk is a new approach for beating the "sitting all day blues," it's not always practical. You can attach some type of blocks to lift your desk. However, this approach lacks the flexibility of easily raising and lowering your computer. There are also collapsible stands available to elevate your computer in case you would like to stand while working. I now use a standing desk that is height-adjustable and allows raising and lowering my computer. Although I stand most of the time, I periodically lower the stand and work sitting down (I use an X-ELITE PRO Sit Stand Desk.) I also stand on a flexible mat.

Do whatever it takes to reverse the negative effects of sitting for long periods of time.

AN INTERESTING EXPERIENCE

A friend of mine related the following to me:

> "Many years ago I was undergoing a very high level of stress in my personal life. I was undergoing therapy and my therapist suggested bicycling around a large park in my neighborhood.
>
> "After trying this and recording my exact times and distance for every ride, I reported back to my therapist that I wasn't making very much progress in my attempt to better my performance. He suggested that I throw away my record book, pedal around the park as slowly as possible, and look around to enjoy the flowers and other sites.
>
> "I took his advice, and I found it relaxing and stress-reducing."

KEY POINTS

- Breathing deeply and slowly reduces feelings of stress.
- Back breathing is the most effective approach for optimal breathing.
- Good posture makes the body better able to handle stress.
- Exercise is critical to control stress levels.
- When sitting for long periods, periodically stand and stretch.

15
Sleep, Nutrition, and Laughter

The best cure for insomnia is to get a lot of sleep.
—W. C. Fields
Eat to live; don't live to eat.
—Benjamin Franklin
Laughter is an instant vacation.
—Milton Berle

The topics of sleep, nutrition, and laughter are extremely relevant because each has a special relation to the body and stress. A good night of sleep nurtures the body; healthy foods strengthen the body; and laughter triggers the release of endorphins, the body's natural feel-good chemicals that promote a sense of well-being and thereby help reduce stress.

SLEEP

Sleep is one of the most frustrating activities in many people's lives. Sleep concerns have created huge industries for products and services. Not getting enough sound sleep affects mood and has long-term health consequences. Chronic disruption of sleep patterns is strongly linked to cardiovascular disease and a number of other health issues including an increased risk of developing Type 2 diabetes; weakened immunity and an increased tendency to get sick; weakened cognitive function including memory, alertness, and decision-making; increased impulsiveness, risk-taking, and addictive behavior; eating more; and ingesting more unhealthy foods.

After drifting off to sleep, we go through several cycles of non-rapid eye movement sleep, followed by cycles of rapid eye movement (REM). Neurons, which help store memories, fire during REM when the brain tries to interpret and organize information. With mobile devices that allow 24/7 communication and unlimited movies and TV shows available digitally at the touch of a button, it's easy to stay up late. It's no wonder that so many adults fail to get the recommended 7 to 9 hours of sleep a night.

Some people wear the lack of sleep like a badge of honor. As a nation, we're not just losing sleep; we are missing the health benefits that sleep brings. Inadequate sleep is linked to nearly a fifth of serious car crashes. It also seems to weaken willpower to eat normal portions of healthy foods.

Typically, it should take less than 15 minutes to fall asleep. If it takes longer than a half-hour and impairs your function the next day, it's considered insomnia. People with insomnia not only struggle to drift off, but also wake up repeatedly. Insomnia is a marker for poor health.

The concept of *compartmentalizing* is useful for people who have difficulty falling asleep. This is especially the case when getting into bed to sleep and the mind keeps itself occupied with various thoughts. Just as a train, submarine, and ship have different compartments, so can the mind. This may be easier for men who tend to think linear, but it can also be very helpful for women who tend to think in a more circular manner. When going to sleep, think of your bed as a compartment for sleeping; nothing else is allowed. The compartment is watertight and only allows those thoughts to enter that are conducive for sleeping.

The quickest tip to fall asleep is to start dreaming. Call it *virtual dreaming.* Envision yourself engaged in some *enjoyable* activity. It has to be something ongoing—some pleasurable activity that is long lasting. The next time you go to bed and do not fall asleep within 15 minutes, engage in virtual dreaming. Enjoy yourself, and sleep well!

Avoid late night meals and alcohol. Some people like a glass of wine before going to sleep. Although alcohol may make you fall asleep faster, the downside is that you might awake multiple times throughout the night.

Meditation and yoga can also ease the transition to sleep, in part because they help clear your mind by refocusing. When I get into bed to sleep, I immediately start slow deep back breathing (4-5 deep slow breaths as I feel my back expand) as described in the last chapter. This procedure of breathing deeply and slowly, while focusing on expanding my lungs through the back, is an excellent first procedure to use when going to asleep. I also listen to easy soft music. I have always fallen asleep before the CD turns itself off.

I keep a pen and a pad of paper close by in case I receive some thought that I want to remember. I write it down and immediately refocus to my procedure of falling asleep.

I never hear a phone call when sleeping because we don't keep a phone in our bedroom.

Create a comfortable environment; keep the room cool and dark. Sleep experts suggest setting the thermostat a few degrees lower to be around 65 degrees Fahrenheit (around 18 degrees Celsius) because the body's temperature should drop a few degrees to initiate sleep. For people who live in hot climates, using minimal or no clothing, or sometimes a light covering, with a fan circulating the air assists in obtaining a sound sleep.

Although exercise is important, resist exercising before bedtime. Core body temperature increases during exercise to a temperature that is not conducive to sleep. During sleep the body needs to have a cooler temperature than when exerting oneself. However, taking a walk after dinner is an excellent exercise that can enhance a good night's sleep.

In the evening, avoid intellectually stimulating projects. Read books or magazines which do not challenge you mentally. If all else fails, move to a chair where you can read until you become sleepy. If you find that you awake a half-hour after falling asleep and have trouble settling down, get out of bed. Read in a chair for a while until you feel sleepy; then return to bed and focus on back breathing.

Morning sunlight is full of blue light, the same spectrum of beams as from digital devices. Playing a video game in the evening erroneously informs the brain's master clock that the day is just beginning. Wear amber sunglasses at night or clip your lamp with red or amber-colored covering. If you read from a tablet, reverse the font and background so the font is white and the background black.

Aim at going to sleep and getting up at about the same time every day. The body clock is an ancient system, common to all life on earth. It relies on sunlight and darkness, periods of activity and periods of rest to calibrate itself. Our internal organs operate in patterns called circadian rhythms that repeat over the course of each 24-hour day. Regular sleeping hours are an important way that the body keeps its rhythms, but today's society has scrambled our inner timing systems. Many modern activities clash with natural rhythms. Staying up late to work or have fun, using laptops, tablets, and other screens before going to bed (or to quell insomnia in the middle of the night), indulging in midnight snacks, and other innocuous activities can certainly throw the body off kilter. In short, we are living in an age of circadian dysfunction.

Anyone who has flown across time zones knows what it feels like to have a body clock that is out of whack: fatigue, insomnia, digestive problems, headache, dizziness, nausea, among other symptoms. Jet lag is a classic ex-

ample of circadian misalignment. The body typically adjusts within a week or so, but some people are increasingly subjecting themselves to the equivalent of permanent jet lag.

When I worked the night shift, I changed my routines to keep them regular. Nurses, firefighters, truck drivers, factory workers, and those in other occupations that have irregular work schedules suffer a disconnection from healthy patterns of sleep. Even so, maintaining a semi-regular sleep pattern is better than having a chaotic one.

Changing habits is not easy. But if more people understood the potential long-term benefits to their mood, sleep quality, cardiovascular health, weight loss goals, and mental sharpness, they might make the effort. Consider sleep and circadian hygiene as important as washing your hands. Just remember that your sleep at night influences your appetite and food choices during the day, and what you eat during the evening can impact how well you sleep.

Before we leave the topic of sleep, a note about napping needs to be included. Perhaps the most famous nap taker was Thomas Alva Edison. His pattern of sleep was to take naps often for short periods. When I returned home early in my educational career after teaching six classes, I would take a 20-minute nap. I limited my naptime to 20 minutes so that the nap would not have a negative effect on my night's sleep. A short nap has healthy benefits and regenerates your energy for the remainder of the day.

NUTRITION

More and more studies are showing that when people do not get enough sleep, they have a tendency to eat unhealthy foods, which tends to lead to weight gain. In addition to good sleep, eating properly can have a significant effect on your health and increase your resistance to stress. The body is designed to take in food during the day and to fast at night. Breakfast (break-the-fast), like sunlight, serves as a timing cue, alerting the body clock that it is morning. So snacking long after dark is as disruptive to natural rhythms as is staying up late bathed in the illumination of a digital screen or some other activity that hinders a good night of sleep.

Here are a few thoughts to consider:

- Begin with focusing on the purpose of food; it is the fuel that keeps your body running. In order to keep your body functioning well for

all the activities in which you engage, you need to take in high quality food.

- Drink more water. Your body needs this essential nutrient. Drinking plenty of water is also a good way to manage hunger.

- Avoid foods with high amounts of fat, sugar, and salt. Foods high in these three ingredients alter the brain's chemistry in such a way that makes you want to overeat.

- Eat a healthy diet. Choose vegetables, whole grains, foods high in fiber, and lean sources of protein—such as fish, lean meat, skinless poultry, and legumes. Limit sugar and foods high in saturated fat.

Some consider separating fruits from other food to be a myth, but you may find it worth trying. If you eat acidic fruit and find yourself feeling bloated, eat fruits (aside from bananas, berries and apples) by themselves rather than with meals. The reason is that different chemical reactions are used for fruit digestion than for digesting other foods. If you eat acidic fruit too close to a meal—especially a large meal—the fruits are held in the stomach longer and start to ferment. If you experience bloating, burping, indigestion, or heartburn after a meal, the cause may be that you are combining acidic fruit with other foods. Consider eating acidic fruit or melons first thing in the morning before breakfast to help the liver and clean the bladder. Eating fruit as a mid-morning snack, and/or in the afternoon are better for your body than junk foods.

The older we grow the more we seem to enjoy food, but the less the body requires it. I try to adjust my life style as my body ages. Do I think or feel that I am depriving myself? Never! I love Julie Andrews' philosophy: *"Some people regard discipline as a chore. For me, it is a kind of order that sets me free to fly."*

The saying that *"We make our habits, and then are habits make us"* is appropriate for this discussion. The body adjusts to going without breakfast and eating junk food, but the discussion in this chapter is about how to *optimize* the body in order to reduce stress. Needless to say, this topic is extremely sensitive for many people. With this in mind, I confine my com-

ments to what I do myself, simply offering nutritional *suggestions* only, keeping in mind that each body is different and has different requirements.

I start with my policy to never go on a diet because I believe that it is more healthful to eat a proper diet all the time than to go on a restrictive diet some of the time. In addition, *if I were to be on a diet, I would eat exactly the same way AFTER the diet as I ate while on the diet.* I also think that food preoccupation is an inevitable result of dieting.

Chapter 7, *Procedures,* explains that procedures are essential for success in any endeavor. Before eating, I decide, how much food I will eat and sometimes place any excess on an empty plate. Another procedure I employ is to eat more slowly. The benefits of slow eating include better digestion, better hydration, easier weight loss or maintenance, and greater satisfaction with meals. In contrast, eating quickly leads to poor digestion, increased weight gain, and lower satisfaction. The message is clear: *Slow down your eating and enjoy improved health.* In addition, eating slowly allows me to enjoy my food more, extend the pleasure of dining, and I am better able control my intake of food. Also, after breakfast and lunch, I drink half a cup of coffee. This gives me the benefit of coffee and its taste without the diuretic of the caffeine in coffee. At dinner, I am able to resist eating more by drinking a glass of water.

As we grow older, our metabolism decreases. Eating the same types and amounts of foods as we did in younger ages increases body weight. The slimness of youth subsides, and the advent of older bodies begins to appear. As we look at the beauty of youth, we try to regain that youthful appearance and so we start to diet. At any given time, at least one in five American adults reports being on a diet, but the majority don't keep the weight off. A huge amount of scientific evidence tells us that dieting does not promote lasting weight loss. In fact, many dieters end up gaining back more weight, and then they quit in discouragement. Diets remain alluring because they offer a clear and quick prescription, dictating what you should and should not eat. They hold the promise of a way to control erratic eating behaviors and revise poor food choices, but these strategies hardly ever work because they are too extreme and thus almost impossible to maintain over long periods of time.

I believe that focusing on short term and immediate results—rather than on a vision of what is most effective in the long run—prompts this mindset. Making small changes to your eating patterns, ones you can build on slowly over time, is truly the best pathway to lasting weight loss. Although you may

have heard this message of moderation before, the evidence is too overwhelming to ignore. The reason that this approach works is that a slow, steady approach allows you to adjust to a new routine at your own pace without the intense effort and denial that typical diet plans require.

Since well-nourished bodies are better prepared to cope with stress, I am mindful of what I eat. After exercising when I arise, I eat breakfast because I believe these two activities will assist my being at optimal performance throughout the day. *My motto is to eat breakfast like a king, lunch like a prince, and dinner like a pauper.* (Again, to lessen the urge to overeat at dinner, I immediately drink water when I feel that I have eaten enough.)

By reducing the amount of coffee, soft drinks, and sugar snacks, the body is more relaxed which enhances better sleep. I only eat sugar when found in dates, raisins, or fresh fruits. I no longer feel a sacrifice when I bypass desserts. I never use artificial sweeteners; they contain toxic ingredients. Soft drinks, sugary snacks, and highly processed fast foods have the effect of actually changing brain circuitry so that you will desire more non-nutritious type foods.

I drink a small glass of wine as recommended on the "Mediterranean diet" but avoid large glasses of red wine because of sensitivity to *rosacea*, the condition that brings redness to the cheeks and nose caused by inflamed blood vessels. I stopped cigarette smoking in my twenties and quit cigars after 35 years when my tongue became sensitive to them.

My salads are always served *without* salad dressing of any kind. My taste buds are now so sensitive that I can taste raw greens. On occasion when I near the end of eating salad, I indulge in a dollop of dressing. I also never eat between meals and only on occasion eat baked goods—including bread (my biggest temptation.) If you are trying to lose weight, cutting calories from sugar may seem like a good idea. But artificial sweeteners—the super sweet, low or no-calorie sugar replacements in diet soda and many low-fat, low-calorie snacks—come with problems of their own. They can trigger greater activation of reward centers of the brain, which changes the way you experience the "reward" you get from sweet tastes. This means that such drinks and snacks have the effect of changing brain circuits so that you desire more non-nutritious type foods.

Creating good habits takes time, patience and resolve, and you will inevitably encounter setbacks along the way. But the key is to never give up—and in a few short months, you may find yourself on the road to the way of life you truly desire.

LAUGHTER

"I've given up social media and am trying to make friends outside of Facebook. I walk every day and tell each passerby what I've eaten, how I feel, what I did the night before, and what I will do tomorrow. Then I share pictures of my family, my dog, and my garden. I also listen to them and tell them that I really enjoy sharing. And it works. I already have three people following me—two police officers and a psychiatrist."

Humor and laughter trigger the release of endorphins, the body's natural feel-good chemicals. Endorphins promote an overall sense of well-being that reduces the negative effects of stress. Laughter makes you feel good; laughter is infectious; and the sound of roaring laughter is contagious. The good feeling that you get when you laugh remains with you even after the laughter subsides. Laughter is engendered through humor, which helps you keep a positive, optimistic outlook in difficult situations, disappointments, and loss. And this priceless medicine is fun, free, and easy to use.

Nothing works faster or more dependably to bring your mind and body back into balance than a good laugh. Laughing is a tremendous resource for surmounting problems, fixing relationships, and supporting both physical and emotional health. Laughter protects the heart; it improves the function of blood vessels and increases blood flow, which can help protect against cardiovascular problems.

Laughter gives you the courage and strength to find new sources of meaning and hope. Even in the most difficult of times, a laugh—or even simply a smile—can go a long way toward making you feel better. It has been said that *the direction in which the corners of your mouth point will be the way your day goes.* During my presentations, I often ask the audience to smile, turn to a neighbor, and say, *"I'm so angry at you."* Try it! You will see how the power of smiling and laughter affect your emotions.

Laughter dissolves distressing emotions. You can not feel anxious, angry, or sad—significant sources of stress—when you are smiling, laughing, or engaging in humor. This simple, free activity increases energy, allowing you to stay focused and accomplish more. Using humor allows you to see situations from a more realistic, less threatening viewpoint. It creates a healthy perspective, which can help you avoid being overwhelmed.

Here are a few suggestions to add humor and laughter to your life:

- Subscribe to a humor website and read a joke each day.

- Read the funny pages.
- Watch a romantic comedy.
- Talk often to someone you find funny.
- Share a joke with someone.
- Purchase or borrow a joke book from a library.
- Host a game night with friends. You may find that just organizing a game is funnier than the game itself.
- Do something silly.
- Spend some time having fun with a child.

Here are some ways to start:

- Laugh. Experts in "laugh therapy" show that it's possible to laugh without experiencing a funny event. You can prove this to yourself by just standing and laughing for 15 seconds.

- Count your blessings. The simple act of considering the good things in your life will distance you from negative thoughts that are a barrier to humor and laughter. When you're in a state of sadness, you have further to travel to get to humor and laughter. Counting your blessings is a key to happiness. The more grateful you are, the happier you will be.

- Spend some time with playful people. People who laugh easily find humor in everyday events. Their humorous point of view and laughter are contagious.

- Bring humor into conversations. Ask people, "What's the funniest thing that you heard or that happened to you today?" "This week?" "In your life?"

One essential characteristic that helps us laugh is to take ourselves less seriously. Unfortunately, there are people who derive satisfaction and even pleasure from having a dark disposition. The classic tight-jawed sourpuss who takes everything seriously and rarely laughs would need to develop a new mindset, a new vision, to live without stress.

Some events are clearly sad and do not warrant laughter, but most events in life don't carry an overwhelming sense of either sadness or delight. They fall into the gray zone of ordinary living with the choice to laugh or not.

We conclude with a few additional ideas to consider. Do things so out of the ordinary that are actually silly—but they will have you smile. Laugh at yourself. Share some embarrassing moments. The best way to take yourself less seriously is to talk about times when you took yourself too seriously. Attempt to laugh at situations rather than bemoan them. Look for the humor in situations, and then laugh at the irony and the sometimes absurdity of them. Look at the stars at night and then reflect how small your problems really are. Surround yourself with reminders to lighten up. Keep a humorous toy on your desk or in your car. Put up a funny poster. Choose a computer screensaver that brings a smile. Have a picture nearby that brings back a fond memory.

Keep life in perspective. Many things in life are beyond our control, especially the behavior of other people. Finally, while you might think that taking the weight of the world on your shoulders is admirable, in the long run it is unrealistic, unproductive, and unhealthy. Instead, focus on small things because *it's really the little things in life that mean the most to us*.

KEY POINTS

- Develop and practice a procedure to help you fall asleep. The procedure needs to be practiced until it becomes a habit. Slow, deep "back breathing" is an example.

- Avoid eating late at night and drinking alcoholic beverages before going to sleep.

- The older we grow the more we seem to enjoy food, but the less the body requires of it. Adjust your life style as your body ages.

- If what you eat is not made in nature, think twice before ingesting it.

- Follow the procedure of deciding how much you plan to eat *before* you take your first bite.

- Humor and laughter are elixirs for reducing stress. Incorporate them in your daily living.

Part V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Distinguishing between multitasking, switchtasking, and singletasking engenders control and reduces stress. Proper breathing and posture enables the body to work effectively in stressful situations. Exercise is critical to keep the body functioning efficiently and is one of the best approaches for handling stress. Proper sleep and nutrition are essential for good health and, along with laughter, are proven strategies for stress management.

SUMMARY

Switchtasking is engaging in two activities where both activities are competing for the same neural connections. Multitasking is also engaging in two activities at the same time—but the tasks are not competing for the same neural connections. Singletasking is engagement where the brain is focused exclusively on one activity.

Breathing can be practiced in different ways. Breathing in which the lungs are filled to capacity and where the back expands is the most efficient approach. Posture is best when in the "noble position" of standing erect, sternum out, and the head is placed properly on the neck. An excellent approach for effectively deal with stress is to exercise. Sitting for many hours a day is harmful. The human body was made for movement.

Sleep is essential for good health and is necessary for stress reduction. Good nutrition is a significant requirement, not only for good health and longevity, but also for handling stress. Another excellent approach for reducing stress is to engage in laughter. Humor and laughter trigger the release of endorphins, the body's natural feel-good chemicals that promote an overall sense of well-being and reduce stress.

CONCLUSION

Be mindful of when you are switchtasking, multitasking, or singletasking. Efficient breathing, good posture, and exercise assist in reducing stress, as do sound sleep, proper nutrition, and laughter.

Part VI

PARENTING AND STRESS

Discipline

Personality Styles

Rewards and Punishments

Part VI
Introduction

PARENTING AND STRESS

Raising children is a creative endeavor, an art rather than a science.
—Bruno Bettelheim

Parenting can be a joy when parents focus on promoting responsibility rather than on obedience. Stress increases when aiming at obedience because this approach rarely creates a desire in today's young people to do what the parent desires. In contrast, when parents focus on promoting responsibility, obedience follows as a natural by-product. Chapter 16, *Discipline and Stress*, describes the *Raise Responsibility System* (discipline system) to reduce stress and handle behavior problems.

Understanding a parent's own personality style and understanding a child's style reduces stress and is the subject of Chapter 17, *Personality Styles*. If a parent's style is in the areas of *thinking* and *doing* and the child's style is in the areas of *relating* and *feelings*, conflicts are inevitable. When a parent is aware of her/his own style AND the style of the child, stress is dramatically reduced and relationships incredibly increased. This is especially the case between a father and daughter where the gender differences affect personality styles.

Chapter 18, *Rewards and Punishments*, addresses the topic of rewards and punishments. A common approach to controlling children's behavior is to use external approaches of rewards to bribe and/or to impose punishments. Many parents today have fallen into the myth that children need to be rewarded in order for them to behave responsibly. Parents have the responsibility to instill moral character values in children—mature values for citizenship—rather than children's values of stickers and candy. As parents, we want mature values promoted whether or not our children know we are watching them.

External rewards and punishments fail the critical test: *How effective are they when no one is around?* In addition, rewarding for expected behavior and imposing punishments are two sides of the same coin. Rewards ask, "What will you give me if I do what you want?" and *imposed* punishments ask, "What will you do to me if I don't?" Both approaches increase stress.

16
Discipline and Stress

To many people, discipline means punishment, but actually, to discipline means to teach. Rather than punishment, discipline should be a positive way of helping and guiding children to achieve self-control.
—Discipline: A Parent's Guide, National PTA, 1993

Parenting should be a joy. But what do you do when a child defies your request? The usual approach is to get angry and resort to using some type of coercion as in threatening, or imposing punishments, or using some manipulation such as bribing by offering a reward. All of these are *external motivational* approaches and often result in stress on the part of parents, and in the case of the young often prompt resistance, reluctance, resentment, and sometimes even rebellion.[4]

The prime reason for this stressful and adversarial relationship is that authority is used with coercion—rather than *authority without coercion.* When parents force obedience, they become engaged in power struggles because obedience does not create desire; it promotes *counterwill*, the instinctive reaction to any sense of being controlled. (Read Chapter 21, *Counterwill*, to understand this phenomenon.)

QUICK TIPS

A parent who was adopting a child asked me if I could suggest something else than continually saying, "No!" My response was to suggest, "Not yet." A "No" answer breaks the relationship. A "Not yet" response achieves exactly the same result but does not alter the relationship because it brings hope.

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[4] This chapter merely touches on the topic of discipline for parents. More extensive information is in my book, *"Parenting Without Stress®: How to Raise Responsible Kids while Keeping a Life of Your Own."* The parenting book is available in hard cover, as an eBook, in an audio format, and in Spanish. Additional suggestions for parents are available at *PiperPress.com.*

The least effective and most stressful approach to getting young people do what you want is to *tell* them. Do you like being told to do something? No one does. One reason *telling* is not as successful as often as we would like is that telling carries an inference: *What you are doing is not good enough and you need to change.* No one likes to hear this message. You know from your own experiences that telling is not as successful as you would like by simply filling in the space, "If I have told you once, I have told you . . . times! If telling worked, you would not have to repeat yourself and your children would always do exactly what you tell them to do the first time.

Here are some reasons that *telling* is problematic:

- After childhood, *telling* is often interpreted as an attempt to control.
- Telling often creates defensiveness *that leads to a tendency to resist*, especially when telling involves notifying others that they need to do something differently.
- Telling implies that something has to be changed. People don't mind change, but they dislike *being told* to change.
- People love to control but *hate to be controlled*. This is especially true for adolescents who are attempting to assert their independence.
- Telling people to be responsible does not work. Responsibility can't successfully be *imposed*; it requires being *taken.*

The way to avoid using coercion, such as telling, is described in Part II of this book, *Practices that Reduce Stress*. To quickly review:(1) always communicate in *positive* language, (2) present *choices or options*, and (3) learn the skill of asking *reflective questions*. Communicating what you want—rather than what you don't want—becomes easy once you start doing it. Offering choices is also quite easy once you start engaging in the practice. The third approach of asking reflective questions is a skill. You can improve this skill when you start implementing it. Just remember to start asking reflective questions *now*; you will improve as you practice.

Here are a few examples of reflective questions to have young people WANT to change:

- What would a mature person do in this situation?
- In the long view, how would doing this be in your own best interest?
- Are you mature enough to do this on your own, or do you need someone to help you?

Another approach is simply to *share* suggestions to prompt reflection.

- You may want to consider what would be best for you in the long run.
- Think about how you would feel if that happened to you.
- I did that once and was I ever sorry!

RAISE RESPONSIBILITY SYSTEM

The Raise Responsibility System (discipline that promotes responsibility) is described in a number of books relating to discipline—including the most widely used books in colleges and universities to teach incoming professionals how to handle discipline. In an effort to give credence and prompt you to learn and use the system, I have taken the liberty of sharing some comments. The system has appeared in *Building Classroom Discipline* from editions eight through eleven, the most recent edition being the eleventh, as this book goes to press.

> "Marshall's *Raise Responsibility System* has major strengths beyond those found in other systems of discipline. It makes sense and rings true for teachers. It focuses on developing responsibility, an enduring quality that remains useful throughout life. It removes the stress that students and teachers normally experience in discipline. It is easy to teach, apply, and live by. It is long lasting because it leads to changes in personality. Educators find these strengths especially compelling, hence, the surge of interest in Marshall's model." —C.M.Charles, *Building Classroom Discipline,* 8th Edition, 2005

> "This body of work cements your position as today's preeminent authority on teaching and working productively with students of all ages."
> —C.M. Charles, *Building Classroom Discipline*, 11th Edition, 2014

The system was created from my experiences—including being a parent; counseling in numerous capacities; classroom teaching on all levels (K-12); serving as an elementary, middle, and high school principal; and service as a district director of education for seven years.

Parents around the world use *The Raise Responsibility System* to reduce stress and handle behavior problems.

To further entice you to learn and use *the Raise Responsibility System*, I share with you below one of hundreds of communications I have received about the system. Read how a parent with two teenagers used the system to reduce stress on all parties involved. Notice how the *parent stayed in control without stress and without using coercion.* You will find no other discipline approach that is as simple and effective for promoting responsible behavior. I relay the letter exactly as I received it.

> When my elementary school first implemented the *Raise Responsibility,* I was somewhat apprehensive about how such a program would work in my classroom. I have always felt that I created a positive learning environment in my class and, frankly, this system seemed like just one more passing fad to add to our classroom management file.
>
> However, after reading Dr. Marshall's book, *Discipline Without Stress, Punishments or Rewards*, I realized that if I were going to use this in my classroom, I should try it at home first. As a mother of two teenagers, creating an environment that was stress-free really appealed to me. I talked to my children about how stressful things were at home and shared with them a little bit about the program that I was 'trying out' on them.
>
> Later that day, I heard my daughter slamming doors and screaming at the top of her lungs at her brother. Before, I

would have stormed in to intervene and quickly reacted to the situation without even thinking. Instead, I calmly began using such questions as: "Is what you are doing something that is beneficial?" My daughter stopped and looked at me and said, "Oh, this is that discipline thing you are using at school, right? Okay, so, no! No, it is not." I then asked, "Is what you are doing something that falls in line with the standards of our family?" She sighed, "No." I said, "Would you tell me what our family approach is regarding yelling?" She relayed to me that yelling was not allowed and that if we had anything to say we could say it in a calm manner. Finally, I said, "Well, what do you think we should do about this?"

I told her to go to her room and reflect on what we should do about what had happened between her and her brother. A little while later, she came back and asked to talk to her brother. She apologized for yelling at him and proceeded to give us a list of consequences that she had decided on. "I guess I should not use the computer for three weeks, or talk on the phone, or go to the movies with my friends," she began to list. We were stunned!

Honestly, this was the first time that she had really accepted responsibility for something so calmly. The next three weeks were very interesting. She answered the phone and we could hear her explain, "I can't talk on the phone right now because my parents . . . I mean I have restricted myself."

Since using this system in our home, life seems so much more enjoyable. The truth is that our children do know what is expected of them. Holding them to a higher level of responsibility has made all of our lives more peaceful.

Thank you.

—Wendi Hall, Vestavia Hills, Alabama

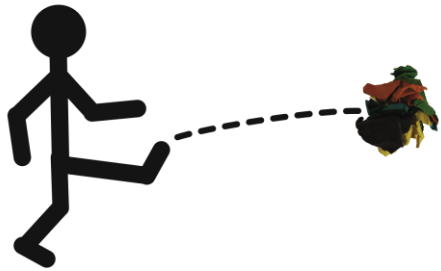
Teaching the Hierarchy of Social Development

Rather than *reacting* after a behavior problem appears, this approach is *proactive.* As soon as your child can talk, you begin with the easy teaching of four (4) concepts, referred to as the *Hierarchy of Social* [and Personal] *Development.* These four concepts are the foundation of the system that handles all behavior problems while promoting responsibility.

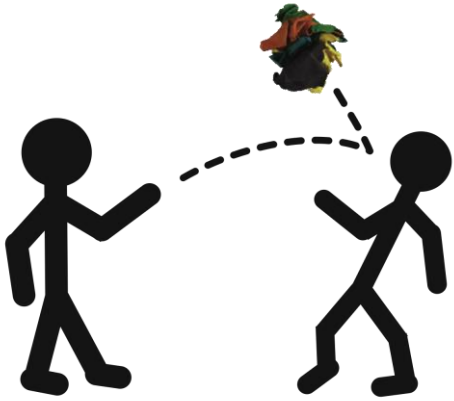
The following illustrations present a *preliminary* overview of the concepts. They are explained here at the outset so that you will have a scaffold to understand them when they are later explained in depth.

Please note that the first two concepts (Level A and Level B) refer to ***behavior*** and are both ***unacceptable***. Level C and D refer to ***motivation*** and are both ***acceptable***.

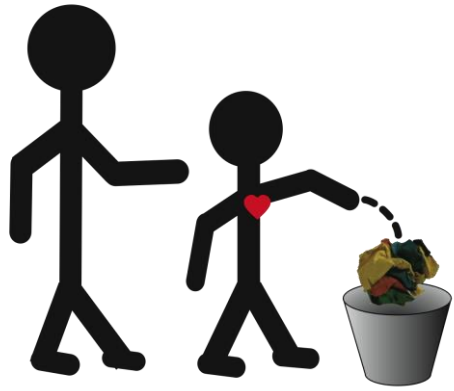
At the lowest level of ***behavior, Level A (Anarchy)***, a young person might kick the trash around the room. Naturally, this level is unacceptable. A person operating at **Level A** can expect an adult to stop the behavior and take control.



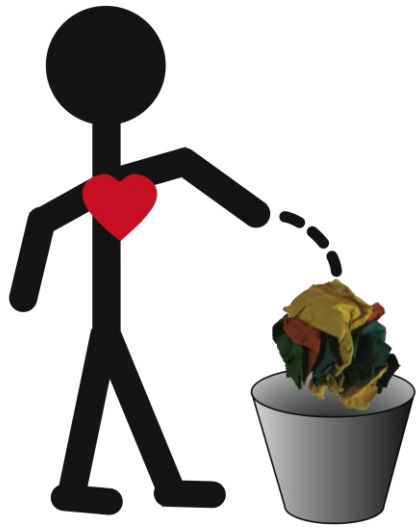
Moving up the ladder, someone on ***Level B behavior (Bossing, Bullying, Bothering)*** might pick up the trash but then *throw* it at someone. This level is also *unacceptable.* A person operating at ***Level B*** can also expect an adult to take control.



Level C <u>motivation</u> (Cooperation/Conformity) is the first of **two acceptable levels.** A youngster would do what the adult asks. A youngster would pick up the trash **at the request of the adult** (external motivation.).
Notice the heart on the young person. This represents the nice inner feeling that follows whenever a young person cooperates with an adult.



Level D motivation (Democracy) is the highest level. At this level, a young person would take the ***initiative*** to pick up the trash and deposit it in the trash can—***whether or not anyone asked or if anyone was watching.***
Look at the size of the heart. Notice how big it is. This is because when a person takes the *initiative* to do what is right, there is a really big *inside reward*—a really good feeling of satisfaction. ***Level D*** is necessary in a ***democracy where people govern themselves, instead of a dictator or king telling them what to do.***



Note: Having young people learn the concepts is critical because reference is *never* made directly to a child's behavior; reference is *always* referred to the *level the youngster has chosen.*

This understanding cannot be emphasized enough because success depends upon parents' *teaching* and young people's *learning* the concepts. This is what "proactive" means. You teach at the outset. Keep in mind that it is the effect of the hierarchy—*how young people mature*—that makes learning the four concepts so valuable. *Think of the hierarchy as a rubric or reference for making decisions in life.* The beauty is that the same four vocabulary concepts can be used at any age as people encounter different experiences and challenges.

In practice, these concepts are referred to as *levels*. As with any hierarchy, the most advanced or highest level is placed at the top because people naturally aspire to the highest level.

LEVEL D – Democracy (highest level)
- Develops self-discipline
- Demonstrates *initiative*
- Displays responsibility
- Does good because it is the right thing to do

The *motivation* is INTERNAL.

The term "Democracy" is used because *democracy and responsibility are inseparable*. Motivation at this level brings the most satisfaction and is the major contributor to healthy self-esteem.

LEVEL C – Cooperation/Conformity
- Considerate
- Cooperates
- Complies
- Conforms

The *motivation* is EXTERNAL.

Action at this level is often prompted by *motivation* to cooperate. *Most of us live our lives at this level.* Other types of external motivation can be to please others, receive a reward, or to avoid a negative consequence. However, there is a danger at this level when a youngster *conforms* or complies to *peer influence* that may not be in the person's best interests.

Because of its foundational characteristic, the key concept is reemphasized: The difference between these two levels (D and C) is in the *motivation*—NOT than in the *behavior*. For example, a person is asked to

pick up trash and does so. The *motivation* to act came from *outside* and therefore would be referred to as Level C—EXternal motivation. However, if the youngster sees the trash and takes the *initiative* to pick it up without being asked, the motivation would be Level D—INternal motivation. *The action of disposing of the trash is identical in both C and D; the difference is in the motivation.* The objective is to teach the *Hierarchy of Social Development* so that people will become aware of their own ***motivation***: ***EX***ternal or ***IN***ternal.

Reviewing the example in Chapter 3, *External and Internal Motivation,* will help explain how external motivation plays in our lives. A group of young people smokes. A young person wants to be accepted by this group. The easiest way to be accepted by this group is to do what the others do. No one from the smoking group approaches the person and says, "Want to join us? Here is a cigarette; smoke it." This never happens. The new person starts to smoke because he or she wants to be liked by the group—to fit in. This concept explains the reason that you see young people wanting to dress and act as their peers dress and act. However, once young people are exposed to the *Hierarchy of Social Development,* they become empowered to resist a temptation to conform to any negative peer influence that is not in their own best interests. Young people learn to understand and articulate the difference between *external* and *internal* motivation. Once you start referring to the difference, you will truly be surprised at its power.

These two higher levels of ***MOTIVATION*** describe how most responsible people with values for a civilized society and culture live most of the time.

The two lower levels of ***BEHAVIOR*** are NOT acceptable.

LEVEL B – Bullying/Bossing
- Bosses others
- Bullies or bothers others
- Breaks laws and makes own standards
- Must be bossed to behave

This level is characterized by a *lack of impulse control*, a lack of consideration for others, and by displaying inappropriate behaviors. When behaving at this level, a person is sending the message, "Control me because I am not capable or mature enough to control myself."

LEVEL A – Anarchy (lowest level)
- Absence of order
- Aimless and chaotic
- Absence of government

This level is characterized by chaos, being out of control, or unsafe. Anarchy is the fundamental enemy of civilization.

NOTE: After teaching the levels, spend no time differentiating between Level A and Level B. Neither is acceptable.

Everyone experiences the various levels of the *Hierarchy*—and sometimes even daily. For example, if you experience great anger, chances are that you have little concern for the effect your behavior has on others. Basically, you become narcissistic *(Level A).* If you drive faster than the speed limit, you are making your own rules of the road *(Level B).* If you are courteous and considerate of others, your *motivation* could be to do what others are doing *(Level C),* or your *motivation* could be to be courteous and considerate of others because that is the *right thing to do (Level D).*

The *Hierarchy* engenders a *desire* to behave responsibly because at a young age people naturally aspire to the highest level. They also learn to recognize inappropriate peer influence, bullying, and irresponsible behaviors so they can learn to rise above them. In addition, Level D brings feelings of satisfaction that Level C cannot attain—as illustrated by the woman who found herself not wanting to return to the market's cashier to pay the 10¢ for the lime she inadvertently had not paid for, as related in Chapter 3.

Asking (Checking for Understanding)

This second phase (if necessary) is based on the simple fact that *the person who asks the question controls the conversation.* You know this from your own experiences. When you walk into a store and the salesperson asks, "How are you today?" there is a natural tendency to respond. When engaged in a conversation with another person and the person suddenly asks you a question, do you continue talking as in a monologue, or do you answer the person's question? You naturally answer the question. The point: *Remain in control of any conversation by asking a question.* This is the approach of *Checking for Understanding.*

This second phase is implemented if a youngster has acted on an inappropriate behavior level (A or B) and *continues irresponsible behavior.* Whatever a person wants to change must first be *acknowledged.* This step

asks the youngster to reflect in order to identify, and thereby acknowledge that an unacceptable level was chosen.

By *asking* to identify the *level* chosen, reference is made to something outside of the person. This step is critical because this approach SEPARATES THE PERSON FROM THE BEHAVIOR, the *act* from the *actor*, a *good kid* from *inappropriate behavior. This separation totally by-passes the usual tendency for anyone to defend oneself.* It is often this natural tendency to self-defend one's behavior that leads to so many confrontations. If you have ever been evaluated in a job, you can prove the difficulty of separating *yourself* from your job *performance* by answering this question, "During the evaluation conference, did you separate *yourself* from *your job performance?"* If you did, you are a rare soul.

Teaching the *hierarchy* and then *Checking for Understanding* handles the vast majority of discipline problems. Prime reasons are *(1) reflection is the most effective approach to induce change, and (2) no coercion is used.* The procedure here is to simply have the young person identify the chosen level. Reflection is immediately engendered and self-defense is never aroused because there is no reference to the person's behavior— *thereby completely by-passing this natural tendency to self-defend.*

Eliciting (Guided Choices)

After having taught the levels of the *Hierarchy of Social Development*, and the youngster has acknowledged having chosen to act on an inappropriate level, and continues irresponsible behavior, then the final stage of "eliciting" is employed. A CONSEQUENCE or PROCEDURE is *ELICITED* to help the person help her/himself prevent future inappropriate behaviors. This approach is in contrast to the usual coercive approach of having a consequence or punishment *IMPOSED,* which often promotes negative feelings, victimhood thinking, and very often reluctance and resistance.

The adult announces, in a non-confrontational manner, that the level chosen is not acceptable and then asks, *"What do you suggest we do about it?"* Be ready to ask, *"What else?" "What else?" "What else?"* until both adult and youngster agree on a *procedure and/or a consequence* that will help the youngster help her/himself.

Advantages of the *Raise Responsibility System:*

- The concepts can be used with any age.

- The adult is always in control because the adult is the one asking.
- Since they youngster has a choice, dignity is preserved.
- Referring to a level, rather than to the behavior itself, the act is separated from the actor, the deed from the doer.
- Since there is no reference made to the person's inappropriate behavior, the youngster never feels a need to self-defend.
- The system fosters motivation to be responsible.
- The system promotes impulse control, reduces victimhood thinking, and fosters those characteristics for successful living.

Two final thoughts:

1) You can *control* your children, but you cannot *change* them. People change themselves; therefore, if you desire a change in a person, first decide what YOU will do differently.

2) From the eminent psychiatrist, William Glasser: *Not teaching young people how to function is like asking them to play a game without teaching them the rules.*

KEY POINTS

- ❖ Discipline should be a positive way of helping and guiding children to achieve self-control.
- ❖ The Raise Responsibility System has three (3) parts:
  - *Teaching* (The Hierarchy of Social Development)
  - *Asking* a reflective question relating to the Hierarchy
  - *Eliciting* a procedure or a consequence
- ❖ The *Raise Responsibility System* is a totally noncoercive—but never permissive—discipline system. Authority is used without coercion.

- Teaching the *Hierarchy of Social Development* prompts reflective thinking of a person's motivation—external or internal.

- Stay in control by asking reflective questions.

- Implementing this discipline system significantly reduces stress on all parties while still maintaining good relationships.

17
Personality Styles

An acorn is capable of becoming a mighty oak, but it will never become a giant redwood—no matter how hard you push it. Discover your child's nature, and then nurture that nature.
—Jim Cathcart

Over the years, a number of personality inventories have been developed using Carl Jung's "forced-choice" approach. If you have ever taken such an inventory, you might have had difficulty making choices between two opposites. For example, would you classify yourself as an introvert or an extrovert? Your choice may be more representative of one but not to the complete exclusion of the other. Therefore, any inventory that uses a forced-choice approach is an artificial attempt to categorize and describe. If we keep this in mind and do not pigeonhole people by the results of such an inventory, the descriptions can be very useful.

STYLES

The Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung was the first to categorize behavioral or personality styles. No style is good or bad, right or wrong. Neither is one style better or worse than another; they are just different. Jung articulated a theory of personality behavior styles that he believed are genetically determined. Styles can be discerned by watching young children. You will discover that they process experiences in different ways. Jung postulated that every individual develops a primacy in one of four major behavioral functions: intuiting, sensing (our senses), thinking, or feeling.

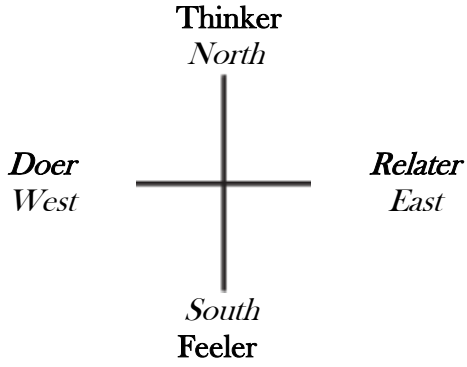
A PERSONALITY STYLES INVENTORY FOR PARENTS

Personality inventories are available with a number of different forms, descriptors, and titles. I have taken twelve such inventories and created the one described below. I wanted one that would be easy to use and could be

implemented immediately. Although the inventory is included in this chapter on parenting, it can be used to understand people in the workplace, as well as family members and others in social situations.

From all the research into personality styles, four descriptors emerge to help parents understand and relate more successfully with their children.

An image of a directional scale will help you picture and remember the styles. Visualize a *thinker* in the north, a "*feeler"* in the south, a *doer* in the west, and a *relater* in the east.



A *thinker (north)* analyzes and can be described as someone who processes information using a great deal of thought. A *feeler (south)* can be described as being more directed through emotions rather than through cognition. A *doer (west)* is orientated toward results, while a *relater (east)* requires relationships.

Since directions are not limited to north, south, east, and west, think in terms of general areas or neighborhoods, such as the north and west, south and east, etc. My styles are predominantly in the thinker and doer areas. I am cognitive (thinker) and project-oriented (doer). So I am in the *Northwest* area. My wife is a writer (thinker) and enjoys social interactions (relater). She is in the *Northeast* area. However, our daughter is guided by her feelings (feeler) and has a great desire to be with people (relater). So her style resides in the *Southeast* neighborhood.

Knowing our daughter's styles allows my wife and me to be much more understanding of her decisions and her behavior. A parent who is aware of styles has a decided advantage in rearing and relating to the child. The same holds true for a husband and wife. Just knowing that my wife wants time to

relate prompts me to redirect my impulse of "getting on with a task." I deliberately take time to listen.

Think of an acorn. If planted well, nourished, and given the proper setting, the tiny acorn will grow into a giant oak tree. It will never become a palm tree. If your child has the nature of a palm, it is useless and even counterproductive to try to make your child into an oak. Parenting becomes so much more enjoyable when you *nurture your child's nature.*

Being aware of styles enhances communications and relationships. When you observe a youth's style and start relating with this understanding, you will experience less stress and more joy in your parenting.

To learn more about your child's styles, go to *WithoutStress.com* and link to *PARENTS*; then scroll down to *ASSESSMENTS*.

Parents who have more than one child readily admit that each child is different. It does not take much social sense to notice differences at even very young ages. The question then arises as to how your understanding of each child's nature can reduce stress. If you are a father with a daughter, there will generally be a tendency to "fix" her problems. However, if your child has more of a feeling nature, your trying to "fix" her problems may not be successful. The situation may be that your daughter listens but doesn't relate to what you are saying. A situation like this prompts stress on the parent who becomes frustrated, as well as the youngster who believes the parent does not understand her.

Listening with an understanding of a child's styles increases the likelihood of more pleasurable parenting—and with less stress. Just as you would not want a youngster's teacher to be frustrated with your child's learning, why would you want your child to be frustrated and stressed by a parent? After all, parents are a child's first teacher.

KEY POINTS

- ❖ Your child is born with certain genetic dispositions.
- ❖ When you nurture your child's nature, your effectiveness, success, and joy in parenting significantly increase.
- ❖ Taking a personality assessment can help you better understand your child's nature, improve your relationships, and reduce stress on the part of both the adult and youth.

18
Rewards and Punishments

Punishments and rewards proceed from basically the same psychological model, one that conceives of motivation as nothing more than the manipulation of behavior.
—Alfie Kohn

A major cause of stress in parenting has to do with behavior. A common approach to controlling children's behavior is to use external approaches of rewards and *imposed* punishments. This chapter is about these approaches. *Please note that the term "rewards" as used here refers to external rewards, rather than to the most satisfying of all rewards: internal satisfaction.*

MYTH

Many people believe that rewards motivate young people to be responsible. They don't! When an external motivator, such as a reward is used, the *motivation* changes. This is illustrated in a classic tale where the *bribes* became the focus, not responsible behavior.

> An elderly gentleman spent each afternoon tending his large garden on his corner lot. A group of ten-year-old boys began harassing him on their way home from school. After a few days of listening to their jeers and insults, he decided to act.
>
> The following day he met the boys as they approached his house. The gentleman told the youths that he lived alone and was enjoying the attention they were giving him. To show his appreciation, he told them that if they continued showing him attention the next day, he would give them each a dollar.

> The following day the fun-loving boys showed up right after school. They showered the elderly man with epithets and catcalls. True to his word, the man put down his gardening tools, walked up to them, and pulled out a roll of bills from his pocket. He handed each boy a dollar and encouraged a repeat on the next day. He told the boys that he would give them each a quarter. Twenty-five cents is still pretty good for a young boy.
>
> The next day at the first taunt and rude comment, the elderly gentleman walked over with a roll of quarters and again paid off his hecklers. He then announced that in the future he would give each of them a penny.

Do you think the boys came back? As soon as a meaningful reward was gone, so were the boys. The sly gentleman's plan was elegantly simple. By rewarding the boys, he changed their motivation from harassing him for fun (internal motivation) to the external motivation of getting a reward.

In contrast to traditional approaches where *expectations* drove motivation, many adults today reward young people when they do something adults desire. The use of external motivators is often short-lived, as illustrated by the following letter I received after a presentation I made at a National Association of Elementary School Principals conference. The experience illustrates the use of external motivation (rewards) as an incentive and its effect on a person's behavior. I relay this letter exactly as he communicated it to me.

> My name is George H. Orfe, and I am the principal from South Dakota who told you the story of the boy and the $5 his father gave him for each "A" grade. You asked that I relate the story to you. Here it is:
>
> I had a father of a fifth grader who gave his son $5 for each "A" on his report card. At the first marking period, the child received eight A's, and $40 from his father.
>
> The second marking period ended in January, and report cards went home at the beginning of February. The father

> was quite upset, since his son had dropped to only one A, 2 B's and the rest C's.
>
> In the conference with the father, I suggested we call his son in to see what the problem was. The boy came into my office, sat down, and we began to talk. I asked, "Why have your grades slipped so much this marking period?" The boy quickly responded, "I didn't need the money!"

We are not honest with young people when we give them rewards for expected behavior. Society does not give such rewards. When was the last time you were rewarded for stopping at a red light?

However, do not assume that I am against rewards. It's just that there is a more effective method than relying on these types of *external* approaches. *(Both my education book and my parenting book show how to create an environment in which young people WANT to behave responsibly by using internal motivation—rather than external approaches of rewards, threats, or imposed punishments.)*

UNDERSTANDING REWARDS

Rewards fail the critical test: *How effective are they when no one is around?*

Rewards change behavior, as noted in the above examples. When a reward is offered as a bribe to motivate or control, the parent will never know whether the motivation becomes one of getting the reward or because it is the right thing to do. More importantly, these rewards to control do nothing towards creating mature values in children.

While most kids will do what parents want them to do to get the treat, these young people are not moving one step closer to becoming more mature or learning values for success as adults.

REWARDS AND EMPLOYMENT

A common point I receive at my presentations on the topic of rewarding relates to the idea that people will only work if they are given a reward. An assumption is made here that people would not work if they were not rewarded. The fact that many people choose to volunteer without compensation puts this idea to rest. In addition, studies on employment universally

conclude that as long as compensation is at a satisfactory level, salary is among the lowest motivators when comparing desirable employment characteristics.

Rather than a reward, employment is a *social contract* between worker and employer. The worker is compensated for services in the form of labor, expertise, or skill. When was the last time you looked at your paycheck and *thanked your employer for the reward?*

CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT USING REWARDS

Rewards can be wonderful ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS. Employee of the month, the "Oscar" of motion pictures, and other such awards are recognitions; *they are not bribes to control.* Everyone likes to be recognized, but no one becomes an actor, for example, to win an Oscar. People generally enter a profession because it is something they desire and in which they want to participate.

Rewards can be great INCENTIVES—if the person is interested in the "reward." As indicated in Chapter 3, *External and Internal Motivation,* if the reward of a contest is a free trip to Bermuda and the person has already visited the island many times and has no desire to return to it, chances are that the person will not enter that particular contest. The incentive is simply not great enough to interest the person. Here is another example. Schools work on an assumption that students are interested in achieving good grades. Some students are, but many are not. Putting forth effort in *learning for a good grade* is not much of an incentive for students who are not interested in this type of reward.

Rewards for EXPECTED BEHAVIORS are counterproductive when it comes to promoting responsibility:

- When we give students rewards for expected behavior, we send a false message. Society does not give rewards for appropriate behavior.

- What comes of rewarding expected behavior can be understood in remarks like, "What's in it for me?" and "If I'm good, what will I get?" This approach undermines the social fabric of our civil democracy and leads to narcissism.

- The message that a behavior is good because it is rewarded appeals to the lowest level of ethical values, namely, "What I am doing must be good because I am being rewarded."

- Rewards for expected behavior imply that responsible behavior is not inherently worthwhile.

- Giving such rewards does not foster moral development. Good or bad, right or wrong, just or unjust, moral or immoral are not considered. Instead, the determining factor becomes getting the "prize."

Perhaps another example will help make the point. A teacher related an experience to me that perfectly sums up one of the pitfalls of relying on rewards.

> We know that rewarding fosters competition to see who gets the most number of rewards. We also know that using rewards as incentives for young people foster feelings of punishments to those who believe they should have received a reward, but didn't.
>
> I teach first grade, and sometimes just getting the kids to remember their folders and to sharpen pencils is a chore. I usually start out the year reminding them, nagging them, and finally giving up. THEY don't care if they have a folder or a pencil. I'm the only one who seems bothered.
>
> So I put a sticker chart in their folders and offer stickers and trips to the treasure box if they come prepared. I KNOW it's not helping, and it bothers me every day as I waste time on this activity, but at least they have pencils when we start to work.
>
> One day recently I was monitoring the kids' work. I commented to one boy about his pencil. It was really short and dull. He said it was all he had, but in his pencil holder on his desk there were three long sharp pencils just sitting there. I

asked him about those. He said, "But those are my sharp pencils! I don't use those. Those are just for getting stickers!"

It took me all year to realize that this kid had used the same pencil EVERY DAY to get a sticker but never used a sharp pencil to write with! So much for external motivation transferring to internal motivation!"

CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT IMPOSING PUINISHMENT

Imposed punishments, like rewards, also fail the critical test: *How effective are they when no one is around?*

The opposite of rewards, are punishments, which are also external motivators. *Rewards and punishments* are two sides of the same coin. Rewards ask, *"What will you give me if I do what you want?"* whereas punishment asks, *"What will you do to me if I don't?"*

Many people believe that *imposed* punishments are necessary to change a young person's behavior. The truth is that *imposed* punishments satisfy the punisher (the adult) but have little lasting effect on the young who are punished. Punishments engender enmity, not responsibility. *When was the last time you felt bad but did good?*

Imposing punishments (in contrast to *eliciting as* explained in Chapter 16*, Discipline)* to control behavior is based on a few myths.

- *Imposing* deprives young people of the opportunity to take responsibility for their own actions.

- *Imposed* punishment moves ownership of the problem from the young person to the adult.

- *Imposed* punishment is too often used for those who don't need it. These youngsters will respond without punitive action.

- *Imposed* punishment is adult-dependent, rather than youth-dependent.

- *Imposed* punishment is temporary and transitory. Once the punishment is over, the youngster has "served his time" and is "free and clear" from further responsibility.

- *Imposed* punishment fosters resentment and invariably diminishes motivation to do what the adult desires.

- *Imposed* punishment is based on avoidance—a negative response. It stirs feelings of fear, anger, resistance, and/or defiance.

- *Imposed* punishment, by its very nature, is counterproductive to good relationships because it fails to foster responsibility and cooperation.

- *Imposed* punishment automatically creates an adversarial relationship between the adult and youngster.

- The threat of *imposing* a punishment may coerce a young person to act appropriately in one situation but have no affect on the way the young person interacts with others in a different situation.

- The threat of an *imposed* punishment may temporarily change behavior—but not the way the young person WANTS to behave.

- Because some young people test the limits of acceptability, the use of authority is sometimes necessary. However, authority can be used without being punitive.

- If you believe an 8-year-old is an 18-year-old, then you will use the same approach with the former as with the latter. However, if you believe that an 8-year-old is not yet an 18-year-old, then you will work with the young person so that *imposed* punishments are not necessary.

- Finally, the coercive approach of *imposed* punishments is the least effective approach to promote long-lasting behavioral change.

CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT EXTERNAL APPROACHES

Carrot and stick approaches—such as rewards to control and imposed punishments—rely solely on "external" motivators. They completely neglect the more powerful "internal" approach for actuating change.

- To emphasize the point: Rewards and imposed punishments are two sides of the same coin. Rewards for expected standards of behavior prompt, *"What will I get if I do what you want me to do?"* Imposed punishments prompt, *"What will you do to me if I don't?"*

- External approaches aim at creating obedience, but obedience does not create desire.

- External approaches are dependent on someone other than the person involved. Yet, the goal is to raise independent, thoughtful citizens. The goal and the approach are in direct conflict.

- Giving rewards for expected actions is inherently unfair to those who have accomplished all that was required—but do not receive a reward. This is commonly referred to as "Punished by Rewards."

- The most satisfying of all rewards are the feelings one receives from the result of one's own effort. This requires "internal" motivation, not "external" manipulation.

In my years of parenting, teaching, counseling, and administration, I have learned that *young people want to be responsible*, but too often parents and teachers use ineffective approaches to help them. I am specifically referring to the use of rewards and imposed punishments to control behavior. Stress levels on both parent and youth are significantly reduced when authority is used *without* coercion.

SELF-ESTEEM

One of my favorite cartoons shows a young boy sitting in the rear seat of a sport utility vehicle (SUV) holding a stick at the end of which is attached a

backpack. The mother is saying to her neighbor, "He's running away from home but he expects me to drive him."

How could a youngster expect this? The reason is that too many parents give children toys, treats, and praise because parents want their children to be happy. I am not against giving such things to the young; however, when children are brought up to *expect* toys or rewards or some praise for doing what they ought to do anyway, we are inadvertently raising them to be narcissistic. Their inevitable thinking is, "What do I get for doing what you want me to do?" This type of self-talk encourages narcissism, *not responsibility.*

The self-esteem movement is based on the erroneous concept that young people develop good feelings about themselves and develop self-esteem by the praise and awards they receive from *other people*. A major flaw regarding self-esteem is the reliance on external motivators. Yet, the most satisfying reward is actually the feeling that arises from *one's own efforts*. *Receiving* does not develop self-esteem; belief in oneself is the result of *giving* efforts to a task. Former generations knew this. At any age, effort and perseverance is what brings the most satisfying of all rewards and is the foundational basis for developing self-esteem.

RESPONSIBILITY

Parents have the responsibility to instill moral character values in children—such as trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship for successful living.

When parents use rewards such as candy, stickers, and movie passes to reinforce desired behaviors, they are using the *values of children* to motivate the young, hoping that these characteristics will transfer to adult values. But experience has shown that they don't. By using the things that children value, parents are merely reinforcing the values of *children*—not the values required to succeed in a democratic and free enterprise system.

Behaviorists, who promote giving rewards to control behavior, are not interested in values. They are interested in changing behavior only, which is the reason that neuroscientists do not use behavioral (external) approaches. They do not delude themselves by thinking that humans are like dogs, pigeons, or rats. Yet, behaviorists used their findings with these creatures to extrapolate that, since the rewarding of behaviors worked on these types of critters, it should work on human beings.

So, while most kids will do what parents want them to do to get the treat, the young haven't moved one step further towards becoming more mature or learning values for success as adults.

Again, in former generations, young people were expected to do what parents asked, and grew up with adult values. Too many of today's parents are rewarding young people gratuitously. The result may be a generation of immature and selfish people.

The chapter concludes with another communication I received for parents to ponder.

> I was talking with a friend who told me the following story.
>
> Recently she had been chatting with a man who coaches soccer teams of 8 and 9 year olds. He mentioned that he'd had a lot of difficulty in getting his players to work together as a team.
>
> My friend, an experienced teacher, started to offer some suggestions; she knew of many activities that might encourage teamwork. But the man quickly stopped her.
>
> "Oh, you don't understand," he said. "It's not the kids who are the problem—it's the parents!
>
> The parents have all promised their children that they'll get two dollars every time they score a goal. The kids are so intent on getting points—all on their own—that I can't get them to pass the ball. It doesn't matter what I do!
>
> It was so bad I even had to hold a special parent meeting to say, 'Stop paying your kids so I can create a team!'"
>
> Apparently, it's not just DWS (Discipline Without Stress) teachers who recognize the negative impact of rewarding!
>
> Rewards change motivation. It's as simple as that!

KEY POINTS

- Rewards can be great acknowledgements and great incentives.
- Using rewards to control and manipulate behavior is counterproductive to promoting responsibility.
- Do not confuse the social contract of employment with using rewards to control people.
- Self-esteem is developed through acts of putting forth effort, rather than by receiving external rewards.
- Parents have the responsibility of teaching adult values rather than the values of children.
- Imposing (vs. *eliciting*) punishment moves ownership of the problem from the young person to the adult.
- Rewards and imposed punishments are two sides of the same coin. Rewards for expected standards of behavior ask, "What will I get if I do it?" Imposed punishments ask, "What will happen to me if I don't?"
- Rewards and punishments fail the critical test: How effective are they when no one is around?
- Stress is reduced when parental authority is used without coercion.

Part VI

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Parenting can be a joy when power conflicts are avoided; when the focus is on promoting responsibility rather than obedience; when authority is used without coercion; when the personality styles of parents and children are understood; and when manipulative approaches of rewarding appropriate behaviors, threatening, and imposing punishments are avoided.

SUMMARY

Stress is aroused in many parents because they aim at obedience, rather than at promoting responsibility. Parents are not alone in this regard. Most adults in many walks of life have not learned how to be in control without using coercion in some manner. The *Raise Responsibility System* is a totally noncoercive discipline and behavior system that uses authority without coercion. The approach has young people wanting to behave responsibly because it promotes internal motivation and satisfaction.

The system consists of three phases: (1) teaching, (2) asking, and (3) eliciting. Counterwill—the instinct to resist being controlled—is bypassed because the natural tendency to defend one's actions is not aroused.

Understanding one's own styles and understanding your child's natural tendencies improves communications and relationships. Every person is different. If your styles as an adult are used with a child who has different styles, stress will naturally by prompted for all involved.

Rewards can be wonderful incentives and acknowledgments but are counterproductive for promoting responsible behavior. When you give a reward for appropriate behavior, you are promoting *children's values* rather than those characteristics and values for successful living.

CONCLUSION

The joy of parenting can be increased significantly when you use authority without coercion, understand your child's styles, and refrain from promoting narcissism and values contrary to building maturity.

Part VII

RELATIONSHIPS AND STRESS

Male and Female Differences

Resolving Conflicts

Counterwill

Part VII
Introduction

RELATIONSHIPS AND STRESS

As human beings, our greatness lies not so much in being able to remake the world as in being able to remake ourselves.
—Mahatma Gandhi

We may want to believe that the differences between genders are only social, but they are much more. These differences also have an effect in resolving conflicts. When coercion is employed, resistance is aroused. This instinctive phenomenon is called counterwill.

Female and male genders differ not only in physical attributes but also in chemistry, structural differences, and brain activities. Understanding gender differences can reduce stress. Chapter 19, *Male and Female Differences,* deals with this subject.

A common mindset in resolving conflicts requires the other person to change. This is a counterproductive approach in that no one can change another person. Control someone else—yes; change someone else—no! People change themselves. With an understanding of this fact of life, relationship problems are much easier to resolve when the noncoercive procedure of *Solving Circles* is employed. This procedure is explained in Chapter 20, *Resolving Conflicts.*

Whenever we try to change another person by using any form of coercion, a natural human tendency to resist is engendered. This phenomenon is referred to as *counterwill.* Parents see this when they engage in power struggles with their children. Stress is reduced with anyone when counterwill is avoided. Understanding this natural instinct to resist coercion is the subject of Chapter 21, *Counterwill.*

19
Male and Female Differences

Men never remember, but women never forget.
—Unknown

Why is it that when a boy is given a doll, he mishandles it? Why is it that when a young girl is given a toy truck, she gives it a name? Are there really inherent differences between most boys and girls?

There is no secret that boys and girls are different—very different. The differences between genders, however, extend beyond what the eye can see. Research reveals major distinguishers between male and female brains.

RESEARCH

The right and left hemispheres of the male and female brains are not set up in exactly the same way. For instance, females tend to have greater verbal centers on both sides of the brain. Perhaps this is the reason that generally women can verbalize past events better than men. This difference is also noticeable when males and females discuss or describe incidences, stories, people, objects, feelings, or places.

Males not only have fewer verbal centers in general but also have less connectivity between their word centers and their memories or feelings. When it comes to discussing feelings, emotions, and senses together, girls tend to have an advantage, and they tend to have more interest in talking about these things.

Scientists generally study four primary areas of difference in male and female brains: *processing, chemistry, structure*, and *activity*. Differences between male and female brains in these areas show up all over the world, but scientists also have discovered exceptions in each gender. Some males are very sensitive, immensely talkative about feelings, and just generally don't seem to fit the "male" stereotype. There are a number of professions where its members do not fit into the general discussion of this chapter because exceptions exist in any category. However, stereotypes are necessary to

communicate. Just keep in mind that there are exceptions to any generalization.

Processing Differences

Male brains utilize nearly seven times more *gray brain matter* while engaged in activities. This can translate to a kind of tunnel vision when males are doing something. Once they are deeply engaged in a task or game, they may not demonstrate much sensitivity to other people or their surroundings. In contrast, female brains utilize nearly ten times more *white brain matter* than males. This difference may explain something that many notice: Females tend to transition from one task to the next more quickly than males. The gray white matter difference may explain why, in adulthood, females are great multitaskers, while men excel in singletasking, highly task-focused projects.

Chemistry Differences

Male and female brains process neurochemicals in different degrees and through gender-specific body-brain connections. Dominant neurochemicals include *serotonin*, which helps us sit still; *testosterone,* our sex and aggression chemical; *estrogen,* a female growth and reproductive chemical; and *oxytocin*, a bonding-relationship chemical.

Because of differences in processing these chemicals, males on average tend to be less inclined to sit still for as long as females and tend to be more physically impulsive and aggressive. Additionally, males process less of the bonding chemical *oxytocin* than females. Overall, a major takeaway of chemistry differences is to realize that boys at times need different strategies for stress release than girls.

Structural Differences

A number of structural elements in the human brain differ between males and females. This refers to actual parts of the brain and the way they are built, including size and mass.

Females often have a higher density of neural connections to the *hippocampus*, the center of emotion and memory. They also tend to have a larger hippocampus. As a result, girls and women tend to absorb more information from all five senses than males do. Notice that females tend to sense a lot more of what is going on around them, and they retain that sensorial information better than males.

Blood Flow and Brain Activity

In contrast to males, females have more blood flow throughout their brains. This is due to more white matter. This may contribute to females often ruminating and revisiting emotional memories more than males. This also explains the quoted aphorism at the beginning of the chapter: *Men never remember, but women never forget.*

These four categories—*processing differences, chemistry differences, structural differences,* and *blood flow and brain activity differences*—are just a sample of why and how males and females think and act differently. Scientists have discovered approximately 100 gender differences in the brain. Understanding gender differences from a neurological perspective, not only opens the door to greater appreciation of the different genders, it also allows us to better understand infants, children, adolescents, and all members of a family.

MANIFESTATIONS

The brain differences between male and female manifest themselves in various ways. The following is a sampling that, once understood, can reduce conflicts and stress. However, as with all generalizations, they do not apply to every male or female but still hold the potential to enhance communications in many situations.

A woman's sense of self is defined through her feelings and the quality of her relationships. A man's sense of self is defined through his ability to achieve results. Whereas a female may be more interested in sharing a problem, a male may be more focused on fixing a problem.

A male often seeks solitude to wind down and desires to be in his "cave" until he feels ready to come out. A female often seeks out other females to discuss problems openly. This manifests itself from a young age. When asked about a problem, a young girl will readily share. In contrast, when a parent wants to find out what is bothering a young boy, engaging the lad in an activity is recommended before expecting him to divulge his feelings.

A man expresses himself best when given the opportunity to prove his potential. The feeling of not being needed is deadly for most males. In this regard, males find it difficult to openly admit to ignorance. This is readily apparent in schools where boys would prefer to get into trouble than show that they do not know the answer or how to do something.

Whereas women enjoy talking and listening, males have more of a tendency to want to get right to the point and prefer not to engage in talk just for the sake of talking. Males who have good relationships with their partners understand that they have to become good listeners. Similarly, women should understand that men become impatient when conversations are needlessly prolonged. Understanding the differences between the genders can assist relationships and reduce stress levels.

KEY POINTS

- Males and females are generally different in areas that are so obvious they need no discussion. These include areas such as stature and strength.
- The brains of males and females differ in processing, chemistry, structure, and blood flow.
- The differences in male and female brains manifest in differences that affect perception and behavior.
- Stress on men can be reduced when they are given time to adjust, especially when first returning home from work.
- Stress on women can be reduced when they are given time to relate and express their feelings.
- Understanding differences between genders can significantly reduce stress.

20
Resolving Conflicts

If you reflect, you will soon conclude that most of your problems and stress emanate from relationships.
—William Glasser

On of the most stressful situations in relationships is when a conflict erupts. *Solving Circles* is a simple application for resolving arguments while keeping good relationships.

A CRITICAL QUESTION

The principle underlying *Solving Circles* can best be understood by your thinking for a moment about one person you know well—a spouse, significant other, friend, child, or even a parent. As you are thinking of this person, ask yourself the following question: *"Have I ever CHANGED that person—not controlled or influenced—but actually changed the person?* "

While it is true that you can control others by exercising authority, the temporary compliance does not change how a person feels or wants to behave. This is certainly the case with both children and adults when the person in authority has exercised coercion but is no longer present to enforce it.

You have just come upon one of the most crucial and critical of all understandings when dealing with people. You can *influence* and even *control* other people, but you cannot *change* anyone but yourself. When you realize this, you have entered into a new dimension for improving relationships with others—and for reducing your own stress.

I can best illustrate this understanding with a story I shared at a marriage conference in Hawaii.

> A fellow hadn't seen a friend of his for some time. One day they met again and the other fellow asked our man how he was doing. The response was not very positive, as he said, "My wife has changed. I'm thinking of divorcing her."

> "Oh!" the friend said, "Don't do that. Take my advice. For six months, treat her like a princess. Buy her flowers, take her out to dinner, take her to the theatre—just treat her like a princess for six months. Then when you divorce her, she'll really miss you, and get back to me."
>
> The man never did get back to his friend, but he ran into him many months later and was asked, "Did you divorce your wife?"
>
> The response: "Divorce my wife? Why would I want to divorce my wife? Living with my wife is like living with a princess."

Who changed?

Whenever I do something that ticks off my wife, I ask myself two questions: (1) "*What can I learn from this?"* and *(2) "How can I make lemonade from this lemon?"* After living with my wife for many years, I know that I have never changed her. Influenced her? Nudged her in a direction? Persuaded her? All yes—but I have never *changed* her. And I don't think she has ever changed me. I have learned that in order to influence her to change, I am the one who needs to change what *I do* before I will see any change in her.

AIM AT CLARIFICATION

When my wife and I disagree, we aim at clarification. I listen and try to understand her viewpoint and her thinking, which are often different from my own. The goal is to *understand*—not influence.

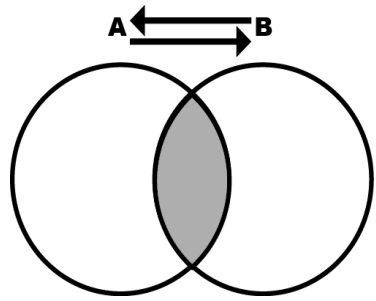
The procedure is to give my own viewpoint and sometimes my reasons. I then listen to my wife's viewpoint. Sometimes she goes first. Listening to my wife's reasoning leads to understanding her viewpoint; it clarifies. Interestingly, this *clarification often leads to influencing each other*. Any relationship can be improved and stress reduced when two people seek clarification in their communications. Very importantly, aiming at clarifying empowers two independent people into one long-lasting and devoted couple.

SOLVING CIRCLES

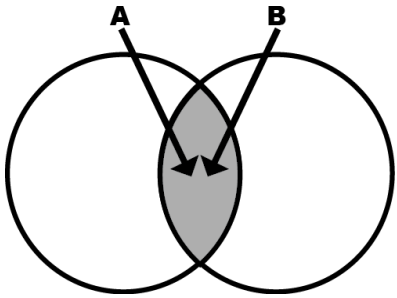
Since people are not changed by other people, the question arises, "What can be done when a conflict arises between two people and the conflict must be resolved?" The answer lies in using *Solving Circles.* The realization that a person can only change her/himself is the theory behind this technique.

Here is how this conflict resolution approach works. Two interlocking circles are envisioned or drawn as in a Venn diagram. The first circle represents person A; the second circle represents person B. The overlapping area between the circles represents the conflict between the two participants.

In a disagreement, the usual approach is for each person to tell the other person what the other person needs to do or stop doing—basically, how the *other* person must change.



Solving circles uses a different strategy. With the realization that no one can change another person—that a person can only change her/himself—person A describes what he himself or she herself will do to resolve the problem. Because of this noncoercive approach, and because person A has demonstrated a desire to resolve the issue, along with the inclination to maintain good relationships, Person B is naturally drawn in, following the same procedure to state what he or she is willing do to resolve the problem.



By discussing one's own behavior, *instead of the behavior of the person,* even difficult conflicts are resolved because each person reflects and takes responsibility for one's own action. *Solving Circles* is eminently successful for the reason that it is not accusatory or coercive. The process allows participants to retain dignity, resolve situations quickly, and immediately improve the relationship.

The principle is simple. As soon as the discussion centers on what each is willing to do—in contrast to what is expected from the other person— both people start to focus on resolving the situation. As long as people psychologically stay in the circle and accept the fact that they can change only their own behavior, they can negotiate almost anything. Each is sending the message, "I want to improve the situation, and here is what I am willing to do."

When the parties are angry, a cooling-off period is necessary first. The focus is rarely on a solution when two people are experiencing anger. When tempers cool, *Solving Circles* can be very productive.

I employed this technique with two four-year-old boys. Using words they could understand, I simply explained that neither could change the other. I then challenged the two youngsters to come up with a solution to their conflict within four minutes. They resolved their dispute in two.

A key to the success of this strategy is to avoid "recycling the past." Focusing on the past simply revisits miseries. The more we stay in the past, the more we avoid facing the present. The past cannot be changed; it is useless to water last year's crops. Since we can only plan for the future, when we are ready to resolve a conflict, discussions must be future-oriented. Two key ingredients for success are (1) keeping the conversation focused on the future and (2) focusing on what each participant will do differently. Realizing that people can only change themselves and that planning is future-oriented are the reasons that *Solving Circles* works like no other method. It is simple, effective, and respectful of each participant.

In the art of persuasion, here are three characteristics that superior salespeople know: (a) never alienate a customer; (b) the art of influence is to induce the person to influence her/himself; and (c) not to use coercion in any of its many forms. These include criticizing, blaming, complaining, nagging, threatening, punishing, or bribing. Using any of these approaches destroys relationships and result in resistance and disconnection. To make the point more vivid, reflect on the following:

How do you feel when someone criticizes you?
How do you feel when someone blames you?
How do you feel when someone complains to you?
How do you feel when someone nags you?
How do you feel when someone threatens you?
How do you feel when someone punishes you?
How do you feel when someone offers you a bribe?

Remember that making a change is emotional as much as it is intellectual. We know we should or should not do things, but it is only when our emotions kick in that we are often prompted to act. Rarely will we want to do something when we feel bad about doing it. People do better when they feel good, not when they feel bad.

Coercion does not promote caring, empathy, desire, integrity, kindness, generosity, or perseverance. These characteristics cannot be mandated.

The main point of this chapter, changing oneself—*what you will do differently*—is the most effective approach for influencing others to change and is a significant stress reducer.

KEY POINTS

- ❖ You can control other people, but you cannot change them.
- ❖ The only person you can change is yourself.
- ❖ Deciding what you will do differently is the quickest and most effective approach to influence others.
- ❖ The art of influence is to induce the person to influence her/himself.

- Clarifying one's position, rather than aiming to control, is more effective and reduces stress.

- *Solving Circles* is a simple and effective approach to resolving conflicts and reducing stress levels.

21
Counterwill

You cannot coerce people into changing their minds.
—Benjamin Franklin protesting the
Stamp Act to King George III

If we look around at our family, friends, and co-workers, we will see that the most successful people, the ones with the least amount of stress, and the happiest are the ones who don't try to control anyone but themselves.

We further realize that the people who are most miserable and have more stress are the ones who try to control others. Even if they have considerable power, the resistance promotes stress and hinders optimum relationships. When we try to control a spouse, partner, or child, the relationship suffers, and if we try to control a friend, the friendship will be short-lived. Yet, we try to control those who are most dear to us.

In any relationship, rather than attempting to control the other person, simply ask yourself, "What can I do to improve this situation?" The powerful result will be that we think of an option that is so much more effective in influencing the other to change than any attempt at control.

The fact is that we rarely, if ever, solve a relationship problem by trying to make the other person see that we are right and he or she is wrong. On the other hand, we never hear someone say, *"I'm having a problem with what you are doing and I think I have to change what I do or we'll never solve the problem."* Yet, this is the secret for improving relationships. It's not necessary to say it out loud, but it is essential to think in these terms.

Let's look at what happens when we try to control or coerce someone. As was mentioned earlier, the name for the natural human resistance to being controlled by someone else is called *counterwill*. This instinctive resistance can take many forms—disobedience or defiance, procrastination, doing the opposite of what is expected, and lack of motivation. Although adults experience this phenomenon, we seem to be surprised when we encounter it with young people. *Counterwill* is normal in toddlers and in young people of all ages. It is such a universal phenomenon at certain stages

of development that it has given rise to the terms "terrible twos" and "rebellious teens."

Consider the rebellious teenager. I believe most theories about the stresses and strains of adolescence overlook the main issue. Reasons for adversarial relationships have focused on physical changes, emerging sexuality, new social demands, conflicts between being a child and becoming an adult, delayed development of the neocortex of the brain, and other such suggestions. It is true that teenagers, by virtue of their hormonal changes, are prone to be emotionally volatile, unpredictable, self-absorbed, and hypersensitive. However, upon a closer inspection, we can conclude that a major factor in this period of life—which is difficult for both adolescents and parents—has its foundation in power struggles.

The underlying dynamic of counterwill is deceptively simple*:* a defensive reaction to felt force in any form. The antidote to counterwill is to avoid prompting negative feelings. The following bears repeating: *The art of influence is to induce people to influence themselves.* People who aim at influencing others—rather than coercing them—have more success and, therefore, less stress.

The practice of telling people to do something often prompts negative feelings. Again, the inference is that what the person is doing is not good enough and needs to change. We may like to tell other people what to do, but *no one likes to be told what to do*. When someone tells you what to do, or that you should be doing something, or you have to do something, how do you feel? Just for a moment, think of something where someone told you what you *had* to do. Notice how it engendered resistance inside you.

I recall a friend telling me how he hated it when his parents told him to do something, even something he wanted to do like playing outside. When he was told, even though it was something he wanted to do, he found an excuse not to do it. Telling does not encourage the desire in people to do what you would like them to do.

The key to avoid promoting negative feelings is to ask questions that prompt reflection. Here is an example of the power of asking reflective questions from Ed Oakley and Doug Krug's *Enlightened Leadership.*

> An insurance company's management team noticed that the average salesman's sales dropped off dramatically after 18 months regardless of the training they received. The company did intensive research to uncover what caused this phe-

nomenon. Ideas were suggested about the reasons for this consistent decrease in sales, including one that always gets a good laugh, "Maybe it's because they ran out of relatives and friends."

The results of the research proved far more interesting. During the early months after training, the sales people would stick closely to the company's recommended approach of asking prospective customers reflective questions and carefully listened to their answers. The process typically took 45 minutes to an hour. After a while, the sales people became better and better at asking questions that generated thought and discussion by the client. This questioning process built a relationship that was very supportive of the client's getting clear about financial needs.

Right around 18 months in their development, an interesting thing happened to most of the sales people. By this time, they had heard nearly all of the possible answers from prospective clients. They had become proficient at sizing up the personal and financial situation of the people they interviewed. Where it used to take 45 minutes to an hour to determine a customer's insurance needs, most could do it now in five or 10 minutes.

The sales people stopped asking questions and carefully listening. Instead, they began doing more talking and less listening and moved into a "sales mode" before establishing a sound relationship.

Prospective customers did not feel comfortable with this approach. A relationship did not have time to develop between the client and the sales people, and neither gained value from the brief discussion. Sales invariably dropped off, while the sales people wondered why their sales figures plummeted for no apparent reason. Then they would get discouraged and become more forceful and demanding, making selling a more difficult task since they were focused on their fear of

rejection and failure. Lowered sales impacted their self-confidence, and a downward performance spiral was in full gear.

If you look at any unsuccessful endeavor—including relationships—ask yourself whether your communications aroused any negative feelings. If so, chances are that any resistance was induced by counterwill.

Here are three magic questions to memorize and have ready when you believe counterwill is involved or you want to improve relationships.

1. Would you be willing to try something different if it benefits you?

2. What would an extraordinary person do in this situation?

3. Are you angry with me or with a situation?

Just remember that successful people reduce their stress by *avoiding anything that prompts counterwill or cuts relationships.* To review an example for reducing stress and becoming more effective, see Wendi Hall's letter in Chapter 16, *Discipline and Stress.*

KEY POINTS

- Relationships are often the cause of stress.
- Happy people focus on controlling themselves—not others.
- Counterwill is the natural human reaction to being controlled and typically results in resistance.
- Avoiding counterwill promotes success and reduces stress.

Part VII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Males and females are different—very different. The differences between genders extend beyond what the eye can see. Research reveals major distinguishers between male and female brains. Solving Circles works around this difference for resolving arguments while keeping good relationships. People who undergo the most stress are those who attempt to control others.

SUMMARY

The right and left hemispheres of the male and female brains are not set up in exactly the same way. There are processing differences, chemistry differences, structural differences, and blood flow and brain activity differences. Understanding gender differences can reduce stress.

Solving Circles is a simple technique for resolving arguments while keeping good relationships. The technique can be used between any two people and is a very effective procedure to use when there are differences that hamper good relationships and increase stress.

Counterwill is the name for the natural human resistance that results when one feels a sense of coercion coming from another. Counterwill is naturally aroused when one person attempts to control another person.

CONCLUSION

The more people know and understand the nature of gender differences, the more effective they become and the less stress they encounter. Problems and challenges can be resolved easily when the focus is on oneself doing something differently, rather than expecting the other person to change. Solving Circles is a simple procedure that resolves conflicts and reduces stress. Any coercion inflicted on another person prompts counterwill, the natural human resistance that results in the face of an attempt to control.

Prompting counterwill promotes stress. Avoid using coercion with others and you will avoid the resulting stress.

Part VIII

UNDERSTANDINGS RELATED TO STRESS

Perfectionism

Attentive Listening

Competition and Collaboration

Part VIII
Introduction

UNDERSTANDINGS AND STRESS

The greatest weapon against stress is our ability to choose one thought over another.
—William James

This section discusses three critical understandings that are essential to reducing stress for people of all ages. They are perfectionism, the skill of listening, and competition vs. collaboration.

Perfection is a goal that humans should never strive to achieve, as it can promote a crippling condition of overly critical self-evaluation. Striving for perfection, rather than for continual improvement, leaves people reluctant to admit mistakes or apologize when in the wrong. Chapter 22, *Perfectionism,* deals with stress that arises from aiming to be perfect.

Attentive listening is the most valuable tool we have for enriching the quality of relationships and reducing stress when working with others. This skill is critical for good relationships. Chapter 23, *Attentive Listening,* shares how to listen in order to improve relationships and reduce stress.

People are competitive by inclination. Competition improves performance. Collaboration, in contrast, has people working together more effectively and efficiently for accomplishment. Teams compete but within teams, members who collaborate accomplish more. This understanding—that between individuals collaboration is superior to competition—is not confined to schools or the workplace. Having siblings learn to collaborate, rather than compete, can significantly improve family relationships and reduce stress. The last chapter in this section, Chapter 24, *Competition and Collaboration,* discusses both competition and collaboration and how they relate to stress.

22
Perfectionism

You cannot learn and be perfect at the same time.
—Marvin Marshall

A goal of excellence, superior work, and outstanding work can all be achieved. But perfectionism, the striving for flawlessness and setting excessively high standards, is too often a burden. Perfection is a goal that humans should not strive to achieve because it can prompt a crippling condition or an overly critical self-evaluation. Perfectionism prompts reluctance to admit mistakes and can be a major cause of creating stress.

A focus on perfection has opened dangerous pathways for many young people. This is too often the case with young girls who develop anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa. These girls believe that they have to be perfect for others to find them acceptable. With young people—as early as kindergarten— perfectionism can become so tyrannical that they develop anxiety attacks. This leads to the thinking pattern that they cannot perform or engage in the activity because they will not be good enough. The next stage is total paralysis. The same holds true for adults who need to pass some inventory for a new job or for an interview.

When young people perform academic-type tasks and are corrected before obtaining feelings of ownership, empowerment, or success, they become candidates for discouragement. This is the case with many very young boys whose parents and schools insist on teaching reading to them when they are not yet cognitively developed enough to successfully handle this type of mental activity. *(Many European schools teach reading only after children are 7-8 years of age.)* Asking young people to do academic work when their thinking pattern promotes a mindset that they cannot perform or engage in the activity because they will not be good enough is counterproductive. It is a reason that many students resist learning. Boys in particular would rather create trouble than admit they are unable to perform an academic task.

Failing is a natural outcome of trying, and it is a great teacher. That is, *it can be if* the choice is to learn from failure, rather than be crushed by it. The emphasis should always be on the effort, on trying. This positive mindset breeds a willingness to experiment, to try, to risk. This is extremely important since improvement comes only with practice.

A friend of mine related an incident that occurred at the birthday party of his young daughter. After his daughter opened a present he had just given her, my friend asked, cajoled, and finally coerced his daughter into sharing her new toy with the other children. What he did not realize is that it is difficult for a child to share or open to others that which the child does not yet "own." The same principle holds true in learning. Young people need to feel some degree of ownership or success in performing a task—or have a feeling that they are capable of it—before correction becomes beneficial. Otherwise, the good intentions of correction are perceived as criticism, which often leads to a dampened desire to perform.

Misguided attempts to correct before taking possession can have unfortunate results. When our daughter was first learning to speak, she made the sound of "s" in a nonstandard way. We called attention to it—only once. For the next several weeks, every time our daughter spoke any word that contained the sound of an "s," she hesitated and tried to make the sound perfect. *We witnessed the first stage of stuttering.* Attention was never called to her speech again, and my wife and I were greatly relieved when her natural speech pattern returned.

When an infant first attempts to walk, we offer encouragement because we know that learning comes by degrees. We do not expect the child to stand up and walk in one day. Similarly, we encourage an infant to speak, even though the sounds are only approximately right. "Exactly right" is made up of a whole series of "approximately rights." Suppose you want an infant to say, "I want a glass of water." If you were to wait until the child articulates that request with a flawless, complete sentence, you would have a seriously dehydrated child.

Striving for perfection, rather than for continual improvement, leaves people reluctant to admit mistakes or apologize when in the wrong. Another manifestation of perfectionism is that people stop participating; they simply give up.

The emphasis should always be on the effort, on trying, as a process. This positive mindset breeds a willingness to experiment, to try, to risk. This is extremely important since improvement only comes with practice.

Experiences should be viewed as a process for receiving information. "Implement now; refine later!" should be the guiding principle. Having a mindset to "extend yourself"—rather than aiming at being perfect—frees you to reap satisfaction from your efforts. This mindset can become a significant characteristic for reducing stress when undergoing new experiences in life.

KEY POINTS

- Perfectionism is a burden.
- Implement now; refine later.
- Failure is feedback—not an end state.
- Aim at continual improvement, not perfection.
- You cannot learn and be perfect at the same time.

23
Attentive Listening

Most of the successful people I've known are the ones who do more listening than talking.
—Bernard Baruch

Attentive listening is the most valuable tool we have for enriching the quality of our relationships and reducing stress when working with others.

If we ask ourselves how we know someone cares for us, one of our responses is likely to be that we know because that person listens to us. If we ask someone in a poor relationship why the person feels that way, the person will often say that the other person "doesn't care about me." Asking, "How do you know?" more often than not results in the response, "He doesn't listen to me." Good listening and caring are so intertwined that if we experience one, we also experience the other.

Have you ever talked to someone and noticed that they were not really listening to you? How did it prompt you to feel? Disrespected? Unimportant? The reason is simple: *When we are thinking while listening, we don't hear well what is being said.*

Attentive listening means *listening without distraction*. Very few people practice this approach to the point of making it a skill. I had the pleasure of having a one-on-one conversation with former President Bill Clinton on two occasions. I still remember how, when conversing with him, I felt that I had his undivided attention. He looked directly in my eyes and gave me the impression that I was the only person he was interested in during our conversations. I have only met one other person who, when I was in her company, felt that *her only interest was speaking and listening to me*. I don't know if both people learned the skill or if it was just natural with them, but I remember the charismatic impression these people had on me.

On the other hand, I also remember the negative feelings engendered while attempting to converse with a supervisor with whom I once worked. I

felt I had just 30 seconds to get my point across; after 30 seconds, his attention went elsewhere.

Someone who was constantly interrupted whenever she was talking with her boss, one day simply said to him, "Could you give me just 10 minutes of uninterrupted time?" After the meeting, her boss told her that it was the best meeting that they ever had. She agreed.

Here are a few tips to help develop the skills of this important attribute:

1. Listen without assuming. Our brains are primed to accept information that agrees with our preconceived notions, which often blocks understanding.

2. Suspend judgment. Sometimes we become so entrenched in our own beliefs and opinions that we close down and don't hear anything different—even from those closest to us.

3. Get curious. The amazing thing about being curious is that it empowers you to overcome a tendency to become defensive. A good way to exercise curiosity is to ask open-ended questions such as, "Can you tell me more about that?"

4. Listen to learn. We can learn much from people whose opinions differ from our own.

5. Become interesting by being interested in others. This helps draw people out and enhances your own learning.

Following are some additional suggestions that will help—one for individuals and the other for groups.

FOR INDIVIDUALS

If your attention has a tendency to wander after listening for a few minutes but want to improve relationships, use this technique: Listen as if you were going to repeat back what is being said to you. This can help you maintain attention or avoid a tendency to interrupt.

Some scientists say that about every 11 seconds our minds talk to us. When we're listening to someone else speak to us—typically about 250

words a minute—our minds, which are capable of dealing with thousands of words per minute, go wandering off.

One way to keep our self-talk in check is to continually focus on the speaker by using the rapid repeat technique. Like anything new, it takes some practice. Here's how it works: As you're listening to someone, you talk along with the speaker in your mind as the person is talking, saying the exact words and phrases, in the same tonality, and at the same speed.

Using this technique, three things occur. First, you hold your concentration because your inner voice, your inner dialogue, has something to do. Second, this procedure enhances recall by reinforcing what you are hearing. Many studies have shown that listening is not nearly so effective in remembering as when listening and then repeating what you have heard. The third aspect has to do with attention. You are more apt to look at the speaker during the process, which promotes your attentiveness.

FOR GROUPS

One of the most successful approaches comes from the Native American aphorism: "Before we can truly understand another person, we must walk a mile in that person's moccasins." Before we can walk in another person's moccasins, *we must first take off our own.* This means to perceive as with the other person's eyes, ears, mind, and spirit.

Another idea to focus the attention of a group, also from Native Americans, is to use a *talking stick (*or any object that can be passed around). Only the person holding the stick is permitted to speak until that person is satisfied that everyone understands. *To be understood does not mean to agree.* The concept is that others are not permitted to make their own points, argue, agree, or disagree while another person holds the stick.

As soon as the individual holding the stick feels understood, the stick is passed to another person. As that person shares, all listen. The others may be required to restate the speaker's position until the speaker feels understood. Using this approach, all parties are responsible for 100 percent of the communications, both speaking and listening. Once everyone feels understood, an amazing thing happens. The focus naturally shifts to problem solving. Negative energy decreases, ill feelings evaporate, mutual respect grows, people become creative, and stress diminishes.

An underlying reason for the success of this approach is that the goal is to clarify, rather than to influence. As mentioned previously, *when the ob-*

jective is to clarify, the result often leads to influence. This results in less stress for all involved.

KEY POINTS

- Attentive listening is critical for good relationships.
- Attentive listening means listening without distractions.
- If your mind wanders when your intention is to listen, look directly at the person speaking and mentally repeat what you hear.

24
Competition and Collaboration

Competition improves performance, but collaboration improves efficiency.
—Marvin Marshall

One needs look no further than the business section, sports section, or political pages of any newspaper to see the pervasiveness of competition. People are competitive by inclination. By comparing ourselves with others, we fall into the realm of competition.

Competition and collaboration are both natural, and both have advantages and disadvantages. This chapter discusses how each relates to stress. Since everyone has had experiences in school, I have chosen educational examples to illustrate various points.

COMPETITION

There is no doubt that competition increases performance. Professional and amateur athletic teams, high school bands, and performing groups practice for hours spurred on by the competitive spirit. Competition is valuable and can be lots of fun. I know this from my own experiences playing the Great Highland Bagpipes. In addition to serving as a pipe major for a band, I enjoy a type of music that only about eight percent of pipers play. This classical music of the pipes is referred to as piobaireachd (pibroch). There is no doubt that if I were not going to engage in this type of musical competition, I would never have spent years learning, practicing, being coached.

Competition has people working *against* each other. Competition in many activities fosters feelings of disappointment, which diminish the innate desire to participate in an activity. This is especially in cases where the person does not have a passion for the particular pursuit. This often starts in kindergarten. For example, very young children come to school eager to learn, but competition dulls the spirit for many. When the teacher says, "Students, let's see who can make the best drawing," the competitive spirit is fostered. The assumption, of course, is that this charge will spur the young-

sters to do their best. Unfortunately, the teacher has unwittingly set up only one of the students to be the winner. Even if all the pictures were to be posted, t*he inference is that only one picture would be the best.* The teacher has unintentionally nurtured "non-winning" with the other children simply because *competition, by its very nature, creates winners and losers.*

In academic and athletic competitions, losing can build character. No one wins all the time in all situations in life. However, in schooling—especially when a young person is *first* learning something—*success* builds confidence (just as it did when learning to walk and ride a bike). In the foregoing example, the teacher could challenge the students without having them compete by saying, "Let's see how good of a drawing you can make."

Competition leads to sorting out, which again fosters feelings of disappointment and diminishes the innate desire to participate in an activity. A common example of the competitive practice is the use of ratings to rank students according to grades, accomplishments, or by some other criteria. I still recall that my high school chemistry teacher had students sit in rank order, depending upon their scores in the most recent test he administered.

There is no doubt that some students who strive to be at the top are stimulated by such incentives. But ratings are an incentive only for students interested in the reward—in this case ranking high. And even though the incentive of ranking high may influence some students in a positive way, it does not necessarily enhance the quality of their work. The reason is that the focus becomes whatever is necessary to achieve the ranking, which is not necessarily the same as what might be required for achieving quality work. Just as importantly, it discourages other members of the class who believe that they will never rank near the top.

There is still another aspect that needs to be considered. Some people who garner good ratings—especially those caught up with perfectionism—often register an emotional paradox; they feel that they don't deserve to be ranked above some of their classmates. In addition, some who receive lower ratings often feel they have been misjudged. Class rankings destroy team spirit, incentive to learn, and any feeling for a learning community.

The education community should break free from the outmoded model of promoting competition between students. Competition is not the path to quality work. Teachers can prove the point to themselves by simply taking a student poll. Ask students how many believe they do their best in school. The higher the grade level (K-12), the lower will be the percentage of positive answers.

It is imperative to understand that grades serve as an incentive in much the same way that rankings do. Many students are interested in achieving high grades. However, there are thousands of young people who show little interest in grades; grades *do not* serve as an incentive for them. Again, when grades are an incentive, the focus is on an external reward, often at the expense of the intrinsic satisfaction of quality work. In addition, there are many areas where earning good grades is frowned upon by youth cultures. The braggadocio of some parents who proudly proclaim on their car, "My student is the honor student of the month," is also frowned upon, as illustrated by the bumper sticker, "My kid beat up your honor roll student."

We should not really blame the parent for this display; the fault is in the system. The same is true for the attempts to encourage honesty when the system of grading and ranking encourages cheating—a major unnecessary problem that permeates schools. Dr. Joseph Duran taught that whenever there is a problem, 85% of the time it is with the system. Only 15% of the time would it be the fault of the people. W. Edwards Deming, the American who created quality in Japan's manufacturing after WWII, went further and suggested that the ratio is closer to 95-5. This is certainly the situation with cheating in schools. If the emphasis is on grades—*rather than on the joy of learning or intrinsic motivation*—then students will do whatever it takes to get good grades. The answer is not to crack down harder on cheaters and somehow enforce honesty; the answer is to change the system, or at least in a classroom to change the emphasis so students collaborate. Rarely in the world outside of schools will you witness vast majorities of employees working in isolation to accomplish a mission. They collaborate.

Competition for grades changes motivation. Teachers know this from the questions students ask. "Will it be on the test?" or "Will it be counted in the grade?" *The focus is not on quality learning but, rather, on the extrinsic reward of the grade.* This is not the case in areas like performing arts and vocational classes. These classes know that grades can even interfere with quality work. A performing arts student is not concerned with the grade. It's the excitement, personalization, and pride of accomplishment that generate quality work. Similarly, a person working on electricity is not interested in only half the electrical charges being conducted, or a welder being satisfied with only a 50% success rate, or a mechanic with the car starting only 75% of the time. Can you imagine a dentist or an airline pilot pleased with anything other than performing their best quality work? Quality is what prompts satisfaction—not some external evaluation such as competing for

grades. This same drive for quality can be fostered in any learning activity. But an emphasis on competition for grades, either by the teacher or student, is counterproductive to this end.

Grades will not disappear from the education scene. However, grades need not drive teaching, since they do not drive quality learning. For a start, teachers can do better than to use traditional grading on a *curve that automatically casts half of the students in a class to a below average rating.* Instead, grades should be thought of as goals, which are mutually established by the class as well as the teacher. Teachers can start with the vision that their role is to assist students—not only to learn and grow but *also to enjoy the process of learning.*

The point of this discussion is not to denigrate competition. It is simply to point out that competition is not the most effective approach for improvement in any endeavor. In addition, it should be obvious that when a person competes and *never* finds oneself in the winner's circle, discouragement and stress are induced.

Let us return to a school situation regarding competition, but now as it relates to winning the teacher's approval. The traditional mode of classroom teaching is to ask questions where the students raise their hands in order to answer. Here again, this approach sets students up to compete for the teacher's attention. Visualize the teacher standing in front of a class and asking a question. Six or eight or ten children strain with their hands in the teacher's face, eager to be called on and show how smart they are. When the teacher calls on only one youngster, there are sounds of sad disappointment or even anger and often looks of dismay on the faces of the eager students who missed a chance to get the teacher's approval. There is also relief on the faces of the others who did not know the answer. The only winner becomes the person the teacher calls upon who provided the correct response. This universal activity is fiercely competitive. The stakes are high because the kids are competing for the approval of one of the most important people in their young world.

This teaching process featuring competition guarantees that the children will not learn to like each other. If you were competing for the teacher's attention and someone else was called upon, you probably would hope that the person would make a mistake so you might have a chance to display your knowledge. If you were to be called upon and failed, or perhaps didn't even raise your hand to compete, you may have felt envy or resentment toward others who knew the answer.

In a competitive approach, positive relations between classmates are not encouraged. Those who fail can become jealous and resentful of others. Successful students often look upon the unsuccessful ones in negative terms, thinking of them as "dumb" or "stupid." Most importantly the number of winners in competition is severely restricted, usually to one. *This means that competition produces more losers than winners.*

To summarize the point: Competition can serve as in incentive to improve performance, but it can have a negative effect on learning efficiency. This is especially the case where success, not failure, is so necessary when *first* learning a skill. Competition can also have a deleterious effect because some people find themselves rarely winning, thereby decreasing their motivation. The focus becomes one of winning or getting the right answer—often at the expense of the joy of learning and quality work. Another consideration is that, although schools focus on right answers, in life after formal schooling, the "right answer" is often not known. *Collaboration serves to solve challenges more effectively than competition.*

COLLABORATION

In contrast to competition, it is though collaboration that people work together more effectively and efficiently for accomplishment. Teams compete, but within teams, the members who collaborate accomplish more.

Let's refer back to Dr. W. Edwards Deming, the American who showed the Japanese and then the world how to improve quality while simultaneously reducing manufacturing costs. Before WWI, anything manufactured in Japan was considered cheap, shoddy, and often referred to as junk. However, you most probably now own something made by a Japanese company. Why? In one word: *quality*. The most prestigious award in Japan's manufacturing industry is the Deming Prize. The underlying principle of the Deming approach is continuous self-inspection and continual improvement. In former traditional approaches, quality control was a specialized task placed at the end of the manufacturing process. If the product failed to pass inspection, the cost of producing the product was wasted. Deming showed how to build quality into the manufacturing process by empowering workers through the encouragement of collaboration. The result: zero defects and improved quality at considerably less cost. With this in mind, collaboration rather than competition, should be the modus operandi in schools, as it is in the world outside of school.

Deming believed that in an atmosphere of cooperation and collaboration, everyone wins. Contrast this to the usual competitive approach, which implies that if one person wins, the other person loses—the winner gets the loser's piece of the pie. People working together can make the pie bigger. Rather than building barriers, which is often a result of competition, Deming believed in breaking down barriers so that more people could derive joy from their efforts. Among his prime principles were continuous improvement, driving out fear, and building trust rather than control. He understood that desire cannot be legislated and that *internal motivation* is the key to improved achievement.

A lack of collaboration is one of many reasons that American education systems are not as effective as schools in other countries. The most successful school systems in the world provide time for teachers to collaborate for lesson planning and for working to create solutions for individual students' needs. In most schools in the United States, teachers enter their classroom, close the door, and become emperors to their students. Not only is there little collaboration between teachers, but the system also diminishes any desire to share and collaborate. The establishment mindset promotes thinking like, "I spent three hours on creating this lesson. Why should I share it with you?" But do not blame teachers. The system is at fault.

Rather than raising hands to compete for the teacher's attention, a better learning approach would be for each student to turn to a "learning buddy" and respond to the teacher's question. This approach gets 100% student involvement. *Even a shy young person will talk to another student.* When activities are structured to be collaborative, learning becomes noncompetitive, all students participate, and learning is enhanced.

This understanding that collaboration is superior to competition is not confined to schools or to the workplace. Having siblings learn to collaborate, rather than compete, can significantly improve family relationships while reducing frustration, aggravation, and stress.

Many employees today work in teams; people in teams collaborate with each other. But every so often someone has the bright idea that people should be rewarded for outstanding performances. So the concept of merit pay is suggested. There are a few assumptions here. One is that salary is a prime motivator for work. No doubt it is, but once a level of satisfactory salary has been reached, money is low on the ranking of what people value. Relationships and environment rank much higher. Besides, merit pay sets

up people to compete with each other—not a very effective way to have people share for continuous improvement.

There is another advantage to collaboration in what it does NOT do. Competition often prompts a desire to control. This is natural and necessary in competitive sports. However, when collaborating for quality work attempting to control others is counterproductive.

We are not going to get rid of competition—nor do we want to. But what we should keep in mind is that in any learning environment, in work-related situations, and especially in situations where relationships are involved, *collaboration is far more effective than competition*. This is especially the case where quality work is the goal. Aiming at collaboration rather than competition also reduces stress for all involved.

KEY POINTS

- Competition is innate in society.
- Competition improves performance.
- Collaboration increases efficiency.
- Collaboration increases motivation.
- Collaboration improves quality work.
- Collaboration reduces stress.

Part VIII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Perfectionism is a disabling trait that promotes stress. Aiming to be perfect is a goal that, in most instances in life, humans will never achieve. Attentive listening is a skill that anyone can develop to improve relationships and avoid stress. Working together collaboratively, rather than competitively, is more successful, efficient, and stress reducing.

SUMMARY

Striving for perfectionism creates problems for people of all ages because it engenders anxiety and stress. Aiming for quality, excellent work, superior achievement, and continual improvement are the hallmarks of successful people. This kind of striving engenders desire and satisfaction because it leads to improvement. In contrast, aiming at perfection too often brings disappointment and sometimes even despair.

Learning how to listen with full attention is one of the most important skills anyone can acquire. Giving another person one's full attention, without judgment and with a willingness to learn, will significantly improve relationships. Attentive listening reduces stress.

Competition and collaboration are both necessary and productive. Whereas competition is a natural inclination, collaboration requires conscious effort. The former improves individual performance and is a natural incentive between groups. On the other hand, when individuals collaborate—rather than compete against each other—superior results are achieved with greater efficiency, more satisfaction, and with less stress for all involved.

CONCLUSION

Strive for continual improvement rather than for perfectionism. This mindset will be more satisfying and reduce stress. *Implement now; refine later* should be the theme. By developing the habit of giving another person your

full attention when listening (and avoiding distractions by not looking at anything else), you will derive more satisfaction, learn more, improve relationships, and reduce stress levels. Enjoy competition, but when working in groups, collaborate for more success and less stress.

Part IX

OTHER TOPICS RELATED TO STRESS

Difficult People

Finance

Aging

Part IX
Introduction

OTHER TOPICS RELATED TO STRESS

It's not stress that kills us; it is our reaction to it.
—Hans Selye

Hans Selye published 33 books and over 1,600 scientific articles, almost all of them on the subject of stress. His speaking topics often included the value of love and the importance helping others. Rather than discussing these topics that are so readily available from other sources, this section concludes the book with three topics that often prompt stress.

Dealing with difficult people can put a real strain on relationships. However, not all difficult people require confrontation. It's simply not worth tussling with some negative people. Regardless of the challenge of dealing with these types of people, one never needs to be the victim. Chapter 25, *Difficult People*, shows how to deal with difficult and challenging people.

Finance can rank as one of the most common cause of stress in many families. This is especially the case in our consumer society that promotes a belief that material goods bring happiness. There are basically two ways to keep one's head above financial waters. One is to spend less, and the other is to save more. Both approaches are discussed in Chapter 26, *Finance.*

Aging is an unstoppable characteristic of living. Although aging cannot be stopped, it can be slowed. Chapter 27, *Aging,* discusses topics related to this subject.

25
Difficult People

When dealing with people, remember you are not dealing with creatures of logic, but creatures of emotion.
—Dale Carnegie

Life is a web of relationships. Human beings are social creatures, deeply entangled in countless relationships throughout life. It is natural to gravitate toward those relationships that bring happiness, growth, and fulfillment. However, sometimes we find ourselves dealing with challenging relationships and difficult people. Navigating these interactions can often result in stress, tension, and anxiety that negatively impact our mood and expose us to unpleasant emotions. This chapter shares some specific approaches to reduce your fear, anxiety, and stress in dealing with difficult people.

SHIFT FROM BEING REACTIVE TO PROACTIVE

When you feel offended by someone's words or deeds, consider viewing the situation in multiple ways. For example, I may be tempted to think that a co-worker is ignoring my messages, or I can consider the possibility that he has been very busy, has family problems, has heard bad news about his health, or simply that he may have a hearing loss. When we avoid personalizing other people's behaviors, we can perceive their expressions more objectively. People do what they do because of their situation, more often than because of us—or what we do. Resist assuming the worst, which prompts negative thinking and feelings. Remember the adage: *Assumptions are the cause of many screw-ups.* By widening our perspective on a situation, we can reduce the possibility of misunderstandings.

In general, whenever two people communicate, one is usually doing more leading, while the other is doing more following. In healthy communications, two people would take turns leading and following. However, some difficult people like to take the lead—and keep it—setting a negative tone, and/or harping on "what's wrong." You can interrupt this behavior

simply by changing the topic. You can say, "By the way . . . ." and initiate a new subject. When you do so, you're setting a more constructive tone by taking the lead and redirecting the conversation.

Not all difficult individuals we face require direct confrontation. Here are two common scenarios and some simple advice for how to deal with them non-confrontationally. The first is when someone has temporary, situational power over you. For example, if you're on the phone with an unfriendly customer service representative, as soon as you hang up and call another agent, this representative will no longer have power over you. Another situation in which you might want to think twice about confrontation is when you derive a certain benefit by putting up with a certain amount of difficult behavior. For example, you might try to have patience with an annoying co-worker because the person is really good at providing analyses for your team. It's helpful to remember that most difficult people have positive qualities, especially if you know how to elicit them.

If certain people constantly tick you off, calmly let them know that their manner of behavior or communication is a problem for you. Avoid accusatory language and instead try the "When you . . . I feel . . ." approach. Another approach is to interrupt the pattern by asking a question completely off-topic, as mentioned above. Remember the strategy: *The person who asks the question controls the conversation.* This technique will allow you to approach the situation proactively, rather than defensively or reactively.

Everyone likes to be acknowledged. A negative feeling is often prompted in us when we feel that others are not listening to what we have to say. In such a case, respond first by expressing your feelings: "When you cut me off in meetings, I feel you don't value my contributions." Then take a moment and wait for a response. You may find that the other person didn't realize you weren't finished speaking, or your colleague was so excited about your idea that she enthusiastically jumped into the conversation.

Another proactive approach is to surround yourself with people who are supportive. In a difficult situation, others will often come to your defense, prompting the difficult person to become more cooperative.

SEPARATE THE PERSON FROM THE ISSUE

In every communication situation, there are two elements present: the relationship you have with this person and the issue you are discussing. An ef-

fective communicator knows how to separate the person from the issue, and be soft on the person but firm on the issue. Examples may assist.

> "I want to talk about what's on your mind, but I can't do it when you're yelling. Let's either sit down and talk more quietly, or take a time out and come back later."

> "I appreciate your putting a lot of time into this project. At the same time, I see that three of the ten requirements still need to be completed. Let's talk about how to finish the job on schedule."

A common reason people put up resistance is because they do not feel heard or understood. It's tempting to just tune these people out, but this rarely stops them. If anything, they'll talk and argue more forcefully. The best thing to do is to use good, active listening techniques—as you would for someone you really care about.

Imagine you are in their shoes for one moment. What do they want? If you were in their situation, what would it feel like? Just this one approach will get you far because most people are seeing only one point of view—their own. Listening and validating allows people to feel significant and is often the quickest approach to moving forward.

REDUCE THE RISK OF FRICTION

Some people are simply not worth the effort it takes to tussle with them. Your time is valuable, so unless there's something important at stake, don't waste it by trying to change or convince a person who is negatively entrenched. As the saying goes: "You can't fly like an eagle if you hang out with turkeys!" Whether you're dealing with a difficult colleague or an annoying relative, be diplomatic. Otherwise, keep a healthy distance whenever possible and redirect your thoughts.

Another important consideration is to realize that you cannot change the other person. By expecting change, you can increase your own stress level—because the change will not occur. Also, rather than being faced with a tone of disapproval, blame, or rejection by a difficult person, simply give feedback and let the other person decide what to do with it. Think of feed-

back as sharing suggestions, rather than as criticism. It is important to refrain from being coercive or to expect immediate change.

It's not uncommon for people to have unrealistic expectations about others. We may want and even expect others to act as we would like, but this is not realistic. People have personality traits, mindsets, and filters developed through their own experiences, all of which play a part in their thoughts and behaviors. Expecting others to do as you would do is setting yourself up for disappointment and frustration.

Don't get embroiled in fights. The way to avoid battling with a difficult person is to manage your emotions. When you do, you can avoid brutal situations. Remember that once you accept the fact that not everyone will like you and that you may not like others, negative emotions can be significantly reduced. Once you make this your mindset, a difficult situation may be improved through an agreement to disagree agreeably.

Don't resist. *What you resist, persists.* People tend to resist you more when you resist them. Spend a little extra time getting to know their point of view. Ask questions to help you understand their perspective.

A wise person considers different points of view and opinions to expand understanding. In doing so, one realizes that this is the essence of diversity. It is often those who challenge or provoke us who prompt us to gain new insights. A thought to remember is that you may not be perfect either, yet people still tolerate you.

Compassion is an attribute that allows us to see opportunities for solutions. Working with difficult or toxic people is no exception. Compassion allows you to see someone who may be looking for relief. If you can think and act from this perspective, you may transmit "compassion" to the other person and help transform the relationship.

NEVER PLAY THE VICTIM

While difficult people may play to their advantage with us, we have a choice to play the victim or not. Be aware that this is a choice. By simply being aware of this, you are able to determine how far someone can go before he or she pushes your buttons. Maintaining an emotional distance requires awareness and is a key approach to reducing your stress.

Toxic people may attempt to consume you by having you swim in their problems. They really don't want to see solutions. They are often comfortable in their unhappiness. They can waste your time by pressuring you to

join their pity party. Don't allow others to determine your joy. By refusing to assume the mindset of victimhood, you own your happiness. This prompts you to smile, nod, and move on.

A fine line exists between offering to listen to problems and getting too deeply involved in the negative emotional twists of such complainers. Be prepared to set limits and distance yourself when necessary.

KEEP YOUR COOL

The first procedure to follow when you come face to face with an unreasonable person is to maintain your composure. The less reactive you are, the more you can use your better judgment to handle the situation. You communicate your emotions in your face, voice, and gestures. When you are talking and facing someone, you cannot help but communicate an outward impression. Coming across as positive and professional prevents stooping to lower levels.

When you feel angry or upset with someone, and before you say anything you might later regret, use the Impulse Management technique described in Chapter 8, *Impulse Control.* To review, start by visualizing a stop light. Take a deep gasp of breath (red), think of your options (yellow), and then make a choice (green). By the time you go through this process, you will have figured out a better way of communicating so that you can reduce the problem instead of escalating it.

As challenging as it is, dealing with a difficult person can be a learning experience. Think of the challenge as a "relationships mirror." Allow the experience to open your eyes. The qualities you notice in others that upset you may be qualities that you also possess. As Jerry Seinfeld said, "I wouldn't want to marry her; she's too much like me!"

No matter what we try, some people can still really get under our skin. It's important that you learn how to handle your frustration when dealing with someone who annoys you. Instead of thinking about how irritating that person is, focus on how you are reacting. Besides, *others don't create your button; they only push it.*

Pinpoint the triggers that might be complicating your feelings. You may be better able to anticipate, soften, or even alter your reaction. It's easier to change your perceptions, attitude, and behavior than to ask someone to be a different kind of person.

Whatever your feelings are for someone, that person will pick up on your attitude and behavior, and theirs will likely reflect back to you. If you are rude to them, they will likely be rude to you, too.

If all else fails, allow space between yourself and those who prompt your negative feelings. Excuse yourself and go on your way. If at work, move to another room or sit at the other end of the conference table. With a bit of distance, perspective, and empathy, you may be able to come back and interact—both with people you like and those you don't like—as if unfazed.

When dealing with young people, indicate that *you* need a "time-out." This is the opposite of the usual approach of *imposing a time out*. Excuse yourself from the situation. Very often the young person will come to you to resolve the negative situation. This approach is amazingly effective.

USE HUMOR

When appropriately used, humor can shine light on how trivial a situation may be in comparison to the larger issues of life. Humor can immediately disarm difficult situations. This applies in all relationships. If you are ever in a difficult conversation, say something humorous. The approach diffuses the situation and reduces negative feelings. For example, here is a phrase that always gets a laugh that I use when someone interrupts when I'm speaking: *"Excuse me for speaking while you're interrupting."*

Think of it this way. Even if your humor does not redirect or diffuse a negative situation, at least you will have enjoyed yourself. Chapter 15, *Sleep, Nutrition, and Laughter,* has some additional ideas on humor and laughter. Of course, everything would be easier if we could wish difficult people away. Too bad! We all know that's not how life works.

Finally, perhaps dealing with difficult people can be described in one word—the same word that describes how porcupines make love—carefully!

KEY POINTS

- Shift from being reactive to proactive.
- Separate the person from the issue.
- Reduce the risk of friction.

- Never play the victim.
- Keep your cool.
- Use humor.

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Finance

Wealth is not in having great possessions but in having fewer wants.
—Epictetus

The basic approach to finance is simple and clear: Spend less than you earn. The reverse is also true: Earn more than you spend. This chapter discusses both approaches.

SPENDING LESS

Being disciplined enough to spend only what you can afford can actually bring great satisfaction. Controlling impulses such as shopping may be easier for some people, but no one need be a victim to one's impulses.

Some of the following ideas and suggestions may assist in saving money. As you strive to get the best value for each dollar you spend, you will more fully enjoy the process as well as your purchases.

Mindsets

Employ the mindset that buying is spending money and that money itself does not bring happiness. Most of the world's population throughout history have lived in poverty most of their lives and still could have been happy.

Focus on what is truly important in your life. Rethink your values; you may be spending money on items that don't fit into your value system. In addition, sticking to your own values can bring you as much happiness as any material possession. There have been many millionaires who have taken their own lives. Understand *that money does not bring happiness; it may bring temporary satisfaction but rarely makes for a happier life.*

Credit Cards

When my wife started college for a second time, I suggested, "Never get behind in your homework." Following the same train of thought, I advise to never miss a credit card payment. It's hard to catch up.

Limit the number of credit cards to two, and always pay at least the minimum each month. Other strategies to consider are using a credit card with zero interest, a card with cash back that effectively reduces the interest rate, or a card with 4-5% cash rebates on certain kinds of purchases.

The temptation to spend more is natural if you use a credit card or debit card. Having to purchase with cash or writing a check significantly reduces impulsive purchases.

Shopping

When about to make a purchase, ask yourself, "In the long run, will I really be happier if I spend money on this purchase and go into more debt?"

If you spend your money only on essentials, you will not only stay in control of your expenditures, you may even enjoy the process of not giving into temptation.

Reduce unnecessary shopping, such as strolling through a mall, window shopping, or surfing online stores with nothing particular in mind—simply looking for great bargains and whatever strikes your fancy. Your buying should become a planned act, spending money on goods and services you need, not spur-of-the-moment impulsive buying.

Don't fall into the assumption that if something costs more it must be of better quality. Some people will pay more just for the prestige of the product. Quality does not necessarily increase with a higher price.

Have adventures shopping cleverly at secondhand stores: Goodwill, the Salvation Army, and consignment stores.

If you are a member of a major warehouse retailer like Costco or Sam's Club, be sure that in spending your money for so-called economy quantities (large amounts of the same items packaged together), you don't defeat your purpose by spending more than you need. Buying in smaller quantities may actually cost you less.

Grocery stores stock their shelves in ways to entice you to spend on impulse items. It's all about marketing. It's in *their* best interest that you buy more rather than less. At home, create a grocery shopping list and be sure you stick to it. Taking time to plan ahead will reduce the temptation to purchase items you don't really need. If shopping with children, *have something to occupy their time* (1) so they will not nag you to buy something they see, and (2) to reduce their influence on your efforts to stick to your list. Certainly, be flexible with your list, but also be cost conscious.

Staying out of stores unless it is absolutely necessary will decrease your temptation to spend money. Find some other activity to occupy your time. For example, rather than walking in a shopping mall, stroll in a nearby park to enjoy nature more or walk in your neighborhood if you feel comfortable doing so.

Be brand flexible. Staying loyal to a specific brand might cost you more money. If you're willing to go with sale items, the store's brand, or the brand for which you have a coupon, you will be more likely to keep a larger share of your money.

Be honest with yourself in what you can afford. For example, buy a home only when you are financially capable. It is hard to reduce a multiyear mortgage. Take the time to make a weekly and monthly budget. You may even want to consult an accountant to review these budgets. A third party will often bring additional considerations to your attention that you may have inadvertently left out of your calculations. If you do decide to go shopping for a home, always offer less than the selling price. Purchasing a home is a simultaneously an emotional decision and a bargaining one. Be prepared to say no to an unaffordable dream.

Saving

Save 10 percent of your income each month. You will find that you enjoy the challenge. When I started on a teacher's salary and worked 10 months of the year, the first thing I did was to put money away to live during the summer when I would not have an income. Because I chose to view the situation as a challenge, I even took pleasure in it.

Find a free bank account. There are many banks and credit unions that offer free accounts. Also, use only no-fee automatic teller machines that are networked into your bank's system and for which you will not be charged a transaction fee.

Home Considerations

When purchasing insurance, opt for the highest deductible. You can save a lot of money when you obtain high deductibles in homeowners, health, and/or auto insurance.

Shop around for the lowest price for phone service and consider whether you really need more than one phone.

When shopping for solar panels to save on ever increasing electricity charges, investigate different types of solar companies. Some companies sell

solar panels outright. Other companies install solar panels on the roof to rent for the electricity generated by the panels. See which approach reduces your electricity bills both in the short and long run.

Learn how to cook. It's usually much cheaper to buy and cook your own meals. If you don't know where to start, visit the library and checkout a cookbook or link to YouTube and watch cooking demonstrations. You may find yourself embarking on a new adventure.

When eating dinner at a restaurant, ask to see and order from the lunch menu. If the restaurant will not serve the lunch portion of the entree, then eat half the dinner portion and box up the rest. You will save money, have a lighter meal, avoid overeating, and go home carrying an additional meal.

Other Considerations

Do not succumb to radio and television advertisements. They have some of the best marketing enticements you will ever hear or see. Determine if you really need the item(s) before spending your money.

Keep a daily and weekly spending record for a month or two. Seeing where your money goes will keep you from lapsing into unnecessary spending because you become more conscious about spending your money. In addition, keeping a daily and weekly spending record is the first step toward establishing a budget. Search the Internet for "planning a budget" to learn specific steps.

Visit the library. You'll be amazed at what fun you and your kids can have there. Some libraries even have story time, arts and crafts, and documentary film showings. You can borrow DVDs, CDs, audio books, and good books to read. *Remember that watching is a passive activity, but reading is active and often brings more satisfaction.*

For exercise, instead of paying for a gym membership, do what my wife did. She invested in some exercise DVDs, exercises at home, gets a better workout, and saves gas and driving time.

EARNING MORE

Earning more than you spend creates a surplus and puts an emphasis on increasing earnings instead of cutting back on expenses. In contrast to a strategy of buying less, the option of earning more requires time, effort, persistence, and oftentimes luck. This is the case when finding odd jobs, tutor-

ing or investing in learning. However, when you are successful, the return on your investment is one of the most satisfying of rewards.

The Internet

In recent years, opportunities for making money on the Internet have exploded, making it possible to increase your income from online creativeness. Most of this section may spur some ideas that may help increase your income using the Internet.

Start with a search for "How to Make Money online" or some similar statement or question. But be careful. Too many sites offer only sales pitches in an effort to convince you to sign up for some seminar, webinar, training session, or other dubious money making proposition. There are legitimate ways to make money online, but they aren't "get rich quick" schemes. Most of them require a lot of work and sometimes a lot of dedication before seeing a return of money for your time invested. However, if I were to recommend one site as a starter to get some Internet training, it would be Tom Antion's online, *Internet Marketing Training Center.*

If you are so inclined, you can learn to build websites. Start with your own site. *GoDaddy.com* is a good source to purchase a domain name—technically a Uniform Resource Locator (URL), informally referred to as a web address. You will also need a template. *WordPress.com* is recommended for professionals, but there are others. Of course, you will need content, which can be as dense as you make it. You will be able to post blogs, items for sale, pictures, videos, and whatever you want. All of these are time consuming and very competitive. The approach also requires additional expertise to rank high on search engines.

Search engine optimization (SEO) is an important Internet marketing skill. Posting items on a website can be a waste of time and effort if what you are posting is never searched for. This is the reason that key words and key word phrases are so important. Your services or products will be found depending on search engine optimization. Having a teenager nerd tutor you or be hired by you is a good way to learn.

Amazon.com has an "Associates" program that offers a search tool to find products and services. When someone purchases your product through this service, you receive remuneration. If you have a product or service to sell, investigate the Amazon's Associate program.

FBA stands for *Fulfillment by Amazon* and it's becoming more popular. Basically, you buy products (in bulk is best) and ship them to Amazon

for them to store. When your products sell, Amazon packs them up, ships them out and sends you the money. There are people making a full-time living from FBA, while others simply do it for some extra money.

Ebay is perhaps the most popular site for selling. You can sell unused items that you have around your home. Look for things you no longer need or wear or perhaps have never even used. Investigate how eBay works, and talk to someone who has had experience with them. Create a profile on eBay, start selling, earn income, and declutter your home in the process!

The difference between Amazon and EBay is that EBay is seen as a used marketplace between individual parties. Amazon (which offers new and used merchandise from 3rd parties) is viewed as a type of Wal-Mart-superstore.

Etsy is a good site for selling handmade crafts and goods. People make decent side money using this site, which is basically an EBay for crafters and artists. If you set up a sellers' account with Etsy, you'll be asked to create a virtual storefront and put up at least five (5) goods for sale.

Craigslist is the modern equivalent of the classified ads that dominated daily newspapers before the Internet. These quick ads are easy to navigate and use, and they're geographically linked. Posting ads on Craigslist is technically easy, but people often have fears about posting their personal information on the site. Consider using email when doing business on Craigslist if you advertise with them.

Many people prefer to purchase goods and/or services though *PayPal*. Starting a PayPal account is a necessity. Amazon, EBay, Etsy and PayPal all take a small cut off the top for selling items through their sites. However, PayPal also accepts credit cards without charging for this service. Apple's flagship *iTunes* store is another possibility for sales income. Remember to be careful with taxes on all income; keep careful records while doing online business. Consult an accountant before you start in order to follow Internal Revenue Services (IRS) regulations.

If you're a musician, writer, artist, tech nerd, pundit, or can produce any type of audio, video, or text worth consuming, you may be able to sell some stuff in Apple's flagship iTunes store. Many people earn a nice living off the iTunes store.

Fiverr is a great place to make a few bucks. Basically, everything starts at $5. You charge $5 for what is referred to as a "gig." You can offer your services however you choose. If you sell art and you're fine selling pieces for

$5 each, that's a gig. You can combine gigs and, thereby, charge for more than $5.

Freelance writing is one of the most popular ways to earn money online. Many successful freelancers can earn an average of 50 cents to a dollar per word. Some are earning more. You first need to build your portfolio and a résumé. Writing takes dedication and time. It is important to remember that good writing requires much editing. However, freelance writing can be profitable if writing is what you enjoy.

Regarding the topic of writing, thousands of eBooks are readily available, and many people prefer to read electronic books. However, many eBooks are sold for little if any money. People who make money from *nonfiction* electronic books often have links in their eBook to a product or service. The point to understand is that more money can be made from their products, rather than from the eBook itself.

Affiliate networks allow you to promote other people's products and services. You simply put a link or a banner on your site and then receive a percentage if someone clicks through and buys the product/service. This requires additional time and expertise that oftentimes is learned best from someone who has a site with affiliate links.

If you have something of value to provide on a consistent weekly or monthly basis, offer a subscription service. There could be a charge each time your product is sent out. The product or service has to be something that your customers can only get by subscribing to your website.

Producing videos, like the other ideas, could be an entire section of its own. Many people have made money by creating YouTube videos. Many bloggers have completely turned to videos to get their point across by starting a video blog, referred to as a vlog.

Being a virtual assistant is another way of making money. As a virtual assistant, you can service multiple clients at the same time. You will be assigned tasks like blogging, research, responding to emails, and doing social networking, such as posting on Facebook and many others.

Other Considerations

Tutoring elementary, middle, and high school students is always in demand, both in person and through the Internet. Like many other opportunities, tutoring offers flexible hours.

If what you really want is a job, start with agencies that employ temporary workers (temp agencies) while you continue to search industries that

interest you on the Internet. You can post your résumé on sites such as *ziprecruiter.com*. Libraries are now often referred to as media centers where computers are available for your use at no charge.

If you are retired, avoid the mindset that retirement is your reward for many years of working. If you indulge yourself with this type of thinking, you may soon discover—sooner than you had expected—that your retirement fund is quickly dwindling.

Keep in mind that stress is often self-inducing. Being mindful of your finances and how you manage them reduce stress.

KEY POINTS

- ❖ Spend less than you earn or earn more than you spend.
- ❖ Create the mindset that buying is spending money.
- ❖ Rethink your values. Focus on what is truly important in your life.
- ❖ Be honest with yourself about what you can afford.
- ❖ Learn Internet skills.
- ❖ Work with agencies that hire.
- ❖ Use the resources available at libraries.

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Aging

You don't stop laughing when you grow old; you grow old when you stop laughing.
—George Bernard Shaw

As in any other of life's adventures, your mindset can control your emotions and resulting stress levels. This chapter discusses some physical and mental factors of aging and how to handle them to reduce stress.

Many of the negative aspects of cognitive aging in older people are linked to the amount of stress experienced in life. Older people who have experienced a lot of stress tend to perform worse on cognitive tasks than those who experienced less stress. Significant amounts of stress in a person's lifetime can affect the ability to hold items in short-term memory. Stress appears to affect an area of the brain essential for the formation of new memories. Older people who have not experienced much stress perform just as well on cognitive tasks as younger people. This suggests that stress has a significant impact on mental ability, but the effect only appears in the later years of one's life.

Developing a less stressful lifestyle not only promotes healthy aging, but also sets the foundation for other habits that are crucial both to successful living and slowing the negative aspects of aging. Keep in mind that aging is not just about the things we do; it's also about the things we should avoid, such as anxiety, smoking, too much alcohol, poor diet, lack of exercise, sleep deprivation, loneliness, and lack of social support.

As we get older our physical and mental abilities have a natural tendency to slow down. Advancing age is associated with an *increase* in body fat and a *reduction* in muscle mass that accounts for decreases in metabolic rate, strength, and energy. So what can we do about it? Start by not expecting miracles. Don't expect to be able to do too much about wrinkles, gray hair, balding, or decreased sexuality. However, with current expertise in plastic surgery, some areas can be cosmetically or medically treated.

In an effort to reduce stress while aging, this chapter is devoted to suggestions for enjoying life gracefully and reducing any pain as we live longer lives. It discusses a variety of topics, some of which you know and some of which may bring activities in which to engage in order to more fully enjoy life and slow the aging process.

MOVEMENT

First and foremost, *move every day* and *stay as strong as long as you can*. The human body is designed for movement, and muscles are not meant to be inactive.

Just like any other muscle, your heart functions best when challenged. Walk, swim, jog, use a treadmill, stair climbing machine, or some other weight-bearing movement in order to include moderate cardiovascular conditioning in your daily program. Aerobic exercise helps maintain a healthy weight, lowers blood pressure, and keeps the arteries more flexible. In addition, aerobic exercise is one of the best approaches for handling stress. It also prevents constipation and is essential for overall good health.

In addition to aerobic exercise, include some strength training to build stronger bones and slow bone loss. Include stretching exercises. As we grow older our muscles contract; they lose fiber and shrink in size and density. Yoga, Tai Chi, and Pilates are all excellent approaches for muscles, balance, and body core development. Consider searching for a massage therapist if you can afford a regular deep tissue massage.

In addition to aging muscles, bones also become smaller in size and density, which causes people to become shorter. Bones also weaken and become more susceptible to fractures. Flexibility is affected so people become less coordinated, which in turn, causes difficulty in balancing. When arising in the morning, sit up for a moment. Place your hands on your knees to assist getting out of bed. Losing one's balance becomes a regular challenge. Be mindful of your balance, especially when getting dressed. A simple procedure is to sit or always lean on something when standing on one foot when putting on slacks.

To save tension on your back, engage in two positions when bending: (1) bend your knees, and (2) get in the habit of extending your rear end as far as possible. These two practices will prevent undue stress on your back and will help prevent back problems. Remember that your legs, the body's

strongest muscles, should do any lifting—not your back. When lifting a heavy object bring the object as close to your body as possible.

A discussion about movement and age would not be complete with mentioning the voice. The voice of an elderly person is easily discernible from the sound of a younger person. The sounds we make require muscle movement and, as with any muscle, they atrophy when not used. Reading out loud is a simple procedure to employ daily—even for a short time. Vocalization keeps your brain and vocal cords active.

SLEEP

Get enough sleep. Quality sleep is important in healing, repairing blood vessels, and mental acuity. The need for sleep varies, but for most people seven to nine hours are sufficient. You may find that the older you grow additional sleep may be required to keep up energy levels. A 20-minute nap in the afternoon can extend your energy for the rest of the day. Taking longer than a 20-minute nap can have a negative effect on bedtime sleep.

DIET

Maintaining a healthy weight is more difficult as you get older. As you age, muscle mass decreases, as noted above, and body fat takes its place. Since fat tissue burns fewer calories than muscle tissue, fewer calories are needed to maintain the same weight. Therefore, an essential factor is to include physical activity in your daily routine. Aside from the advantage to overall health, physical activity helps to maintain a healthy weight.

Remember to drink plenty of fluids—especially water, and watch the amount of food you intake. Eating is among the many unfair challenges in life. The older we grow the less food we need, but the more we enjoy the activity! Many people actually feel better when they eat less. The "MIND" (Mediterranean Intervention for Neurodegenerative Delay) diet dramatically lowers the risk of developing Alzheimer's. This diet is rich in berries, vegetables, whole grains and nuts.

More information on the topic of nutrition is in Chapter 15, *Sleep, Nutrition, and Laughter.*

MEMORY

As we age, brain processing and behavior associated with attention and movement slow down. Memory in particular becomes less efficient with age. It takes longer to learn and remember names and recall words. Since the brain thinks in pictures rather than in words, developing the habit of creating images helps memory. To emphasize the point, physical activity increases blood flow to your entire body—including your brain, which is another reason to exercise.

You can also stay mentally active by stimulating your brain with new learning. This includes mental games, learning a new language, learning to play a musical instrument, and reading. These are all "active" activities, in contrast to passive activities such as watching television. Activities generally bring more enjoyment and satisfaction than passive activities.

RELATIONSHIPS

Social relationships are critical as we age. If living alone, consider adopting a pet. If someone close to you passes on, consider joining a support group to help you through the grieving process. Consider moving to a more socially active environment. Social interaction helps prevent depression and stress, both of which contribute to memory inefficacy. Make opportunities to interact with others. Cursive or script writing is a great way to keep your brain and muscles in shape. Handwriting letters to friends is good for the writer and the receiver, and it's a great way to stay in touch.

Volunteering not only keeps you active, it also brings with it the satisfaction of helping others.

Research has found that the more engaged people stay throughout life—physically, socially, and intellectually—the more resilient they are to dementia. In other words, staying active, seeing friends, being conscious of what you are doing, and having a sense of purpose all appear to reduce the risk of Alzheimer's and other neurological problems with the very elderly.

VISION AND HEARING

For many people, vision often becomes more opaque as they advance in age. Cataract surgery is very common and effective, taking but a few minutes to replace an eye lens to markedly improve eyesight. In addition, focusing

on objects and adapting to different levels of light may become more difficult. Scheduling an eye examination on a regular basis belongs on your list of things to do.

If you find reading becoming more difficult, purchase magnifying glasses at a local drug store to suit your needs until you have a yearly eye exam.

Older age often affects hearing. Following a conversation in a crowd or maintaining the ability to hear higher frequencies may become difficult. Hearing aids are so much more advanced than when my mother-in-law wore a box around her neck. Be proud of your age and don't let vanity diminish your joy. There are many products now available for using a hearing aid for ordinary conversation. Many technologies are also available for watching television so the volume you desire won't affect the volume of others who are watching the same program with you.

TEETH

Scheduling a dental examination on a regular basis also belongs on your list of things to do—if for no other reason than cleaning away the plaque that accumulates in your mouth. Plaque can have a deleterious effect on your heart. The gums in your mouth may recede, and if your mouth is too dry when sleeping, you may become vulnerable to decay and infection. Specialized mouthwash is now available, and you may even have seen them advertised since dry mouth becomes so common with aging. Brushing teeth regularly and flossing after meals is smart. Use the little brushes for cleaning between your teeth (available at drug stores). These handy small brushes clean away food particles and at the same time stimulate the gums. Taking care of your teeth saves money in the long run and helps you avoid the stress of pain associated with tooth decay.

SKIN

Skin dries as we age because of decreased production of natural oils, referred to as cellular senescence. Skin also becomes less elastic and fragile. Repairing slows. Older people bruise more easily because fatty tissue just below the outer skin layer withers. Wrinkles, age spots and small growths on the skin become more common. When outdoors, especially between 10:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m., sunscreen on exposed skin is a must. Moisturizing cream or lotion can help. Minimize hot, prolonged bathing. Reduce the

number of showers—unless it is really necessary to shower every day. Use a mild soap, such as Dove when showering, and only soap necessary areas. Using soap all over the body is extremely drying.

SEX

With older age, sexual performance changes. Illness or medication might affect the ability to enjoy sex. For women, vaginal dryness can make sex uncomfortable. For men, impotence might become a concern. It might take longer for an erection, and erections might not be as firm as they used to be. Since everyone becomes aware of body changes with the years, if you have a concern in this area, share them with your partner. Experiment with different positions. Consult your physician. Medical options are available.

RETIREMENT

Retirement is a new phase in life with new opportunities and new experiences, many of which will be enjoyable—if you keep a positive mindset. Speak to an active retired person and you will hear a comment like, *"I'm so busy that I don't know how I had time to work."*

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Although most grandparents delight in spending time with their grandchildren, many grandparents are finding themselves in the role of parenting again. This unanticipated situation can be stressful or not, depending upon the approach used. If you find yourself in this situation, I urge you to check out the book, "*Parenting Without Stress: How to Raise Responsible Kids While Keeping a Life of Your own"* available at *PiperPress.com.*

If you find yourself in the role of a caregiver assisting someone in failing health, remember the advice given on every airplane flight. Place your own oxygen mask on first before assisting anyone else. With this in mind, consider that the person you are taking care of would want you to take care of yourself.

Even if dementia were not a concern, it would be wise to plan ahead. Take steps to activate a lasting power of attorney and create a will. Managing finances should also be considered. If you have a life insurance policy, be sure it is kept with your other important papers. Unless the beneficiary

knows where the policy is kept, the benefits may never be realized. Unfortunately, many insurance companies will not disperse the benefits until they are claimed.

Some of the suggestions for healthful aging have already been included in this chapter, but here is a quick review: (1) Continue learning, such as reading in a different genre, take an interest in a new hobby, or take music lessons. (2) Engage in regular cognitive and physical activities. (3) Strengthen and maintain social ties. (4) Get out and explore new things. (5) Be positive to be happy. (6) Avoid people who are downers, if even close family members. (7) Be conscientious and diligent. (8) Spend time engaged in activities that are meaningful and goal-directed. (9) Be heart-healthy; what is good for the heart is good for the brain. (10) Eat a MIND diet with fresh fruit, vegetables, and fish. Limit your salt intake.

Remember that it's never too late to adopt a healthy lifestyle. The aging process can't be stopped but you can certainly slow it down.

Three caveats: (1) Limit your alcohol. Too much alcohol not only can cause severe physical damage but it also can lead to confusion and memory loss. (2) Don't smoke. Smoking contributes to the hardening of arteries, increased blood pressure, increased heart rate, increased risk of dementia, and increased wrinkling of the skin. (3) Be wary of ingesting or inhaling anything that can alter the brain. Think of it as your most prized possession.

Be *kind* to yourself, be *patient* with yourself, learn to *adjust* positively, learn to *enjoy* the process, and treat advancing age as another adventure.

KEY POINTS

- Move every day and stay strong as long as you can.
- Aerobic exercise, strengthening, and stretching routines slow aging.
- Sufficient sleep and engaging in mental activities keeps the brain active.
- Eating a healthy diet in moderate proportions increases health.
- Maintain a mindset of positivity and joy in living.
- Keep socially active.

Part IX

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Dealing with difficult people can be very stressful. However, there are a number of strategies available to reduce the stress. Financial problems are a leading cause of stress, but even here stress can be reduced depending upon your mindset and strategies. Finally, aging cannot be stopped, but it can certainly be slowed by implementing healthy suggestions.

SUMMARY

Communicating and relating to difficult and challenging people can be very stressful. However, there are strategies that can be implemented to reduce the anxiety and frustrations. Start by being proactive rather than reactive. Resist being offended; having a mindset that the problem is with the other person empowers you. Never play the victim. Keep your cool and consider using humor to interrupt negative feelings.

The most basic personal finance approach is simple and clear: Spend less or earn more. A myriad of approaches can help to reduce financial stress. Some of these include using credit cards responsibly, developing a mindset that shopping is spending money, and learning to save and/or earn money.

Aging is an attribute of living longer. Although it cannot be stopped, certainly the aging process can be slowed. Maintaining active relationships, eating a healthy diet, engaging in appropriate physical and mental exercises, and obtaining sufficient sleep are essential. Viewing living longer as another one of life's experiences can make aging less stressful.

CONCLUSION

Difficult people are difficult if you label them as such. Considering this type of person as a challenge can be satisfying when friction is removed. Use the suggested strategies to reduce stress. Learning how to save money can be a

very satisfying experience; it is empowering to feel in control of your purse strings. Regarding earning more income, be creative and persevere. Live long enough to reach elderly status and enjoy the journey.

EPILOGUE

Since we have the power to change our thinking, we also have the ability to alter our emotions.
—Marvin Marshall

Aside from pain caused by some physical condition, stress is largely a person's own creation. Most of the stress we encounter in life is prompted by challenges in relationships, challenges in other situations, and how we handle our own thinking.

Many chapters in the book have been devoted to relationships and situations. This section extends the discussion of how being mindful of our thinking can alter our emotions. We start by repeating a passage from Chapter 11, *Language*.

> We all have had the experience of reading a novel and being so moved by the fate of one of its characters that we felt love, hate, or anger. Sometimes we cried—even though the individual whose fate so moved us never existed. Reflect on this for a moment. A writer took a blank slate and through words alone created a human being so real that the words—only words—prompted our emotions.

Our brains receive stimuli from two sources: (1) Our senses, as in the above example, and (2) Our self-talk. We start with the latter.

SELF-TALK

Self-talk is often a self-fulfilling prophecy. If we believe that we are not capable of doing something and we fill our minds with debilitating thoughts, chances are slim that success will follow. In contrast, when self-talk is positive, the body's chemistry engenders chemical responses that boost self-confidence to enhance success.

Hopefully, the many discussions on the prime principles of *positivity, choice, and reflection* will endure in your thinking and, thereby, actuate a positive approach and attitude in your daily living.

OUR SENSES

Let's now turn to the subject of external stimuli, their effect on emotions, and how they need not control us—if we so desire.

Stimuli come to us from our senses: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching.

We look at each in this order.

Seeing

You are watching someone in a movie, a very well liked character. You have witnessed her long life's challenges and pleasures. Now, she is on her deathbed. This final scene shows a number of episodes previously shown as she concludes her life. Don't your eyes drop a tear as you experience this sad drama? You watched and the emotion followed.

You have not seen a friend for sometime—a dear, long lost friend. You saw, and an emotion followed.

You are walking down a commercial street, see a store for children's clothes, and then notice an advertisement in the window that reads:

> "For sale: *Infant's shoes, never used.*"

Do not these words prompt an emotion? You merely saw a sign, made an inference, and an emotion followed.

The point is obvious. The act of seeing can prompt emotions.

Hearing

You are watching a television program. The scene changes and the first thing you hear is humorous music. Just hearing the music sets the mood. The same effect occurs on the brain when the music is sad or has a dancing tempo. Even before the scene starts, you are prompted to be in an emotional state.

A classic story about hearing may help make the point.

Two men, both seriously ill, occupied the same hospital room. One man was allowed to sit up in his bed for an hour each afternoon to help drain the fluid from his lungs. His bed was next to the room's only window. The other man had to spend all his time flat on his back.

The men talked for hours on end. They spoke of their wives and families, their homes, their jobs, their involvement in the military service, and where they had spent their vacations. And every afternoon when the man in the bed by the window could sit up, he would pass the time by describing to his roommate all the things he could see outside the window.

The man laying flat in the other bed began to live for those one-hour periods where his world would be broadened and enlivened by all the activity and color of the world outside.

The window overlooked a park with a lovely lake. Ducks and swans played on the water while children sailed their model boats. Young lovers walked arm in arm amidst flowers of every color of the rainbow. Grand old trees graced the landscape, and a fine view of the city skyline could be seen in the distance.

As the man by the window described all this in exquisite detail, the man on the other side of the room would close his eyes and imagine the picturesque scene. Then unexpectedly, a sinister thought entered his mind. Why should the other man experience all the pleasures of seeing everything while he himself never got to see anything? It didn't seem fair.

At first thought, the man felt ashamed. But as the days passed and he missed seeing more sights, his envy eroded into resentment and soon turned him sour. He began to brood and he found himself unable to sleep. He should be by that window! That thought, and only that thought, now controlled his life.

> Late one night as he lay staring at the ceiling, the man by the window began to cough. He was choking on the fluid in his lungs. The other man watched in the dimly lit room as the struggling man by the window groped for the button to call for help.
>
> In less than five minutes, the coughing and choking stopped, along with the sound of breathing. Now there was only silence—deathly silence.
>
> The following morning the day nurse arrived. When she found the lifeless body of the man by the window, she was saddened and called the hospital attendants to take the body away. As soon as it seemed appropriate, the other man asked if he could be moved next to the window. The nurse was happy to make the switch, and after making sure he was comfortable, she left him alone. Slowly, painfully, the man propped himself up on one elbow to take his first look at the world outside. Finally, he would have the joy of seeing it all himself. He strained to slowly turn to look out the window beside the bed. It faced a blank wall.
>
> The man asked the nurse what could have compelled his deceased roommate who had described such wonderful things outside this window for the man to hear. The nurse responded that the man was blind and could not even see the wall. She said, "Perhaps he wanted you to hear pleasant things in order to encourage you."

Hearing and seeing are the body's senses that are most dominant in an average person's life.

The other senses have that same possibility, as illustrated next.

Smelling

Do you drink coffee in the morning? If you are a coffee drinker and awaken to the aroma of your favorite coffee, how do you feel? That smell, my friend, engenders an emotion.

Tasting

Ever eat ice cream on a hot summer day? Ever enjoy popcorn when watching a movie? Ever taste a phenomenal dessert? Ever taste a juicy steak? Would you deny that foods prompt emotions?

Touching

Ever kiss someone you love? Ever hold an infant? Ever hold another body close to yours.

The feelings produced by touch are self-evident.

CONTROLLING EMOTIONS

As indicated throughout the book, the only way to change an emotion is to change thinking. *Emotion always follows cognition.*

With this in mind, I play a little game with myself. Before I share it, we review the *Hierarchy of Social Development* and the difference between Level C, *External* Motivation, and Level D, *Internal* Motivation, as explained in Chapter 16, *Discipline and Stress.* Just being cognizant of these two types of motivation often actuates the behavior of acting *reflectively*—rather than acting *reflexively*.

Here is my game. When I am seeing or watching something that arouses an emotion, I tell myself that I am merely seeing something. Just the mindfulness of articulating this to myself often stops the emotional affect the scene would normally prompt.

Similarly, when I am listening to music that arouses me, I tell myself that I am merely listening to a sound. The same result occurs; the music no longer has the same emotional effect.

I am merely pointing out that the mind can exercise phenomenal control over our emotions. And so it is with stress.

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